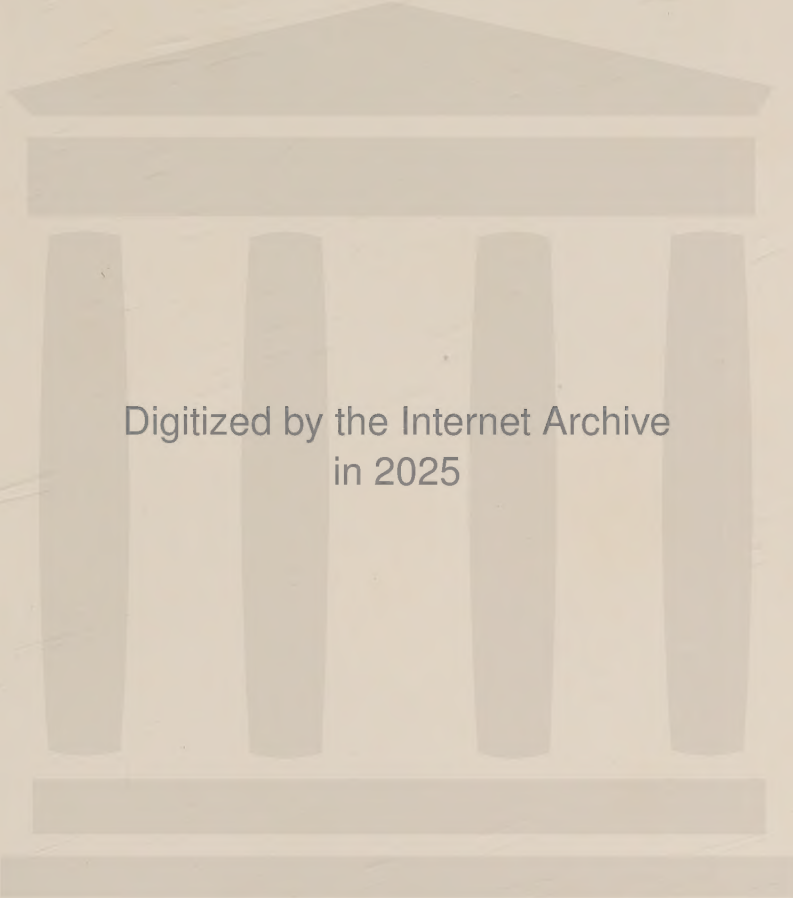
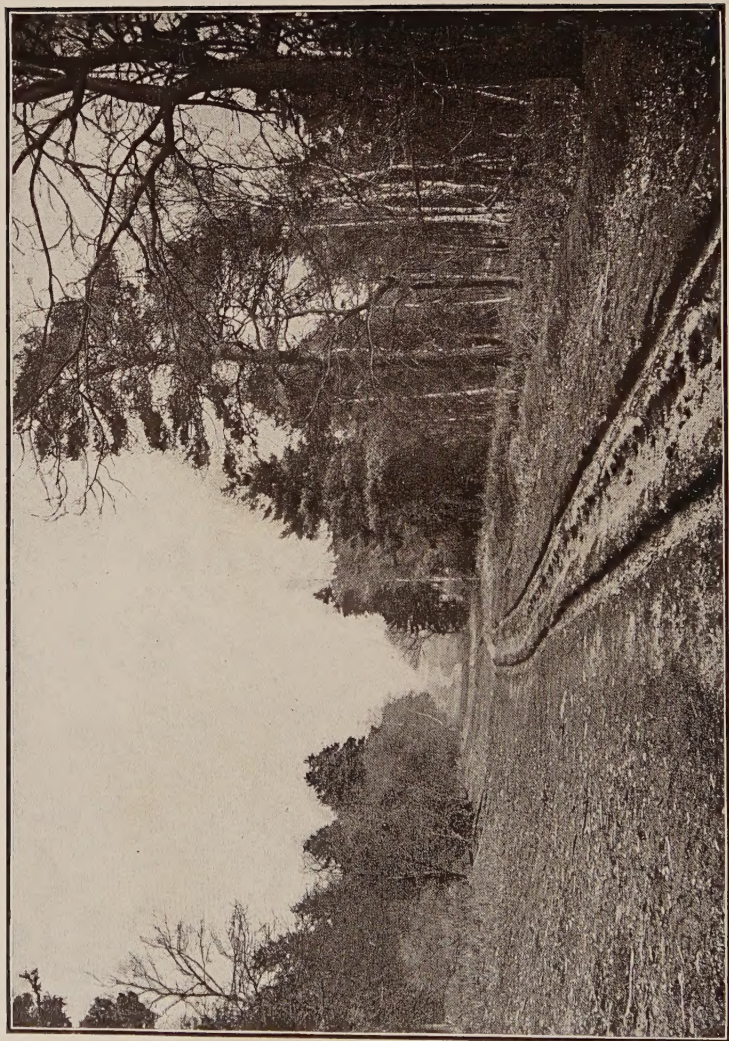


IN BRECKLAND WILDS



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THE DROVE ROAD

IN BRECKLAND WILDS

BY

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Prehistoric Antiquities," etc.

WITH AN APPRECIATION BY

H. J. MASSINGHAM

TWENTY-SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS

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MADE IN ENGLAND

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PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR

AN APPRECIATION

IN Mark Twain's *A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur* occurs this passage :

“You see my kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its office-holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing ; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to ; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease and death.”

Such a passage may of course be taken in various ways ; I prefer to take it as light upon the personality of W. G. Clarke.

Nobody can read this book without marvelling at the breadth and depth of his knowledge about that unique stretch of country in south-western East Anglia called the Brecks. As Clarke tells us, the average population of Breckland is eighty-two people to the square mile ; in all England, the average is 669. Hardy's Egdon, parts of the Cornish moors and coastline, Dartmoor, the old lead-mining areas of western Mendip, the higher peaks of the Pennines, the Welsh mountains and the Lake District, fragments of the New Forest, the Wiltshire Downs and the ancient fen country of Norfolk and Suffolk, the patches of dune and shingle-beach along our coasts—all these

have preserved that primordial and so eternal element of nature which man in a faithful word calls the wilderness. They observe the fevers of progress and civilization with that ironic detachment which Matthew Arnold held to be the refuge of the stars. They are worth nothing; they are old enough to be almost timeless and beyond decay; and they are not very interested in us as we are to-day. In fact, they owe nothing at all to us, and we owe nothing to them. They are the wilderness. And yet there is a bond between man and the wilderness which lies so far below the superimpositions of our current values that it is hard to say exactly what it is. In order that it may mean something to us, the wilderness seems to demand a certain preparedness in us, a certain activity of our non-rational, I had almost said unthinking, being, a kind of suspense from the conditional routine of our lives. It is not a state of mind but of being, and it is not mystical nor rarefied in any way, nor is it love of solitude, for the "call" of the wilderness often burns brightest when human contacts are closest and warmest. It is a real and natural feeling, not something you have to work yourself up to, and when it comes, you realize that it has been hidden by artificial restraints, and that what is felt is not ecstasy but a sense of permanence, security, and rest.

But with the exception of Breckland, an area of 400 square miles, all, or nearly all, our wildernesses are pools, not lakes or inland seas of primeval apartness. I once went a walk on the Brecks with Clarke, and but for the variety of pinewood with mere, virgin forests of bracken and turf—or ling-covered desert, and the richer flush of the colouring, I might have been in W. H. Hudson's own

Patagonia, the grey unchanging barren plain that spreads from sea to sea. The Brecks that day gave me an inkling of what it meant to wander forty years in the Desert.

This strange land Clarke knew off by heart and by head. There was nothing he didn't know about it. Every insect, every bird, every mollusc, every flower, nearly every rabbit—he knew where they were, why they were there, how they lived, how many of them were there and how many there would be in the future. Fauna, flora, geology, rainfall, physical geography, archæology, village history, their knowledge streamed out of him, and every mortal thing that crept, grew, ran, lay or stood on the beloved heaths he walked with so springy a step he knew as well as though their area had been 400 inches instead of miles. Such piles of useless knowledge about all those useless miles which led nowhere and produced nothing but rubbish! And though to Clarke Breckland was the goldfield of East Anglia, he knew almost as much about the rest of the country, as readers of his book *Norfolk and Suffolk* and of his papers in the Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society (of which he was once President) have no need for me to remind them. The country to him was "the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing," and since such desert-wisdom profits not a man, we can only conclude that he loved the wilderness as deeply as he knew it.

A casual reader of this book might assume that Clarke, apart from his exceptionally kindly and personable nature, could be summed up as a local specialist upon his native country. Certainly, his was the way of facts rather than impressions. He loved the wilderness as a companion rather than a dream or a thoery. Yet he was

not the prisoner of his own material, as many experts are. And to an extraordinary degree was he exempt from the arrogance of specialism. I say "extraordinary," because on that famous Breckwalk with him which so nearly killed me with fatigue, he interlarded his information with a running fire of questions as to what I thought about Breckland, really as though I rather than he were the fount of reference. He did this not in the least out of compliment to me, nor to make me a convenient foil for his own spiritual as well as material knowledge of these English wilds, but because of his inherent modesty of temper. On a considered view, he was the most humble-minded man of learning I ever met. Yes, and the most open-minded, the freest of professional dogma. Specialism and a free mind are not inseparables by the nature of things.

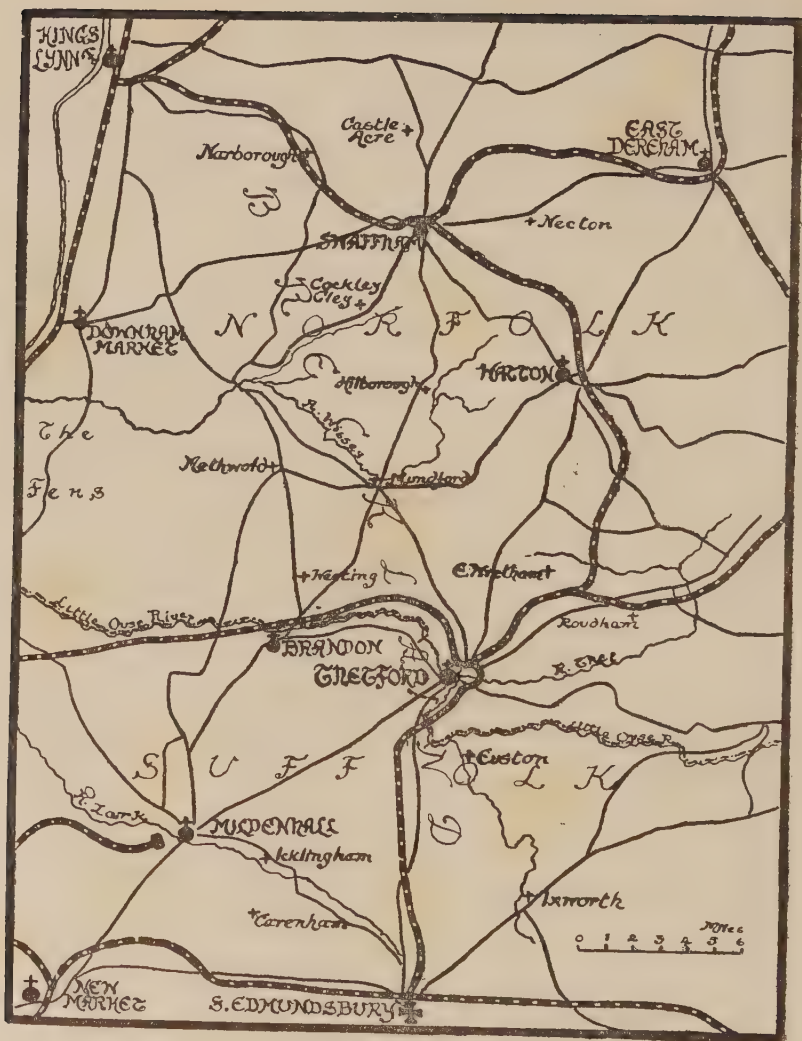
Here is an example. The reader of this book will see that Clarke takes the orthodox view of "neolithic" man and his works, as the trackways (the Icknield, Drove, and Peddar's Ways) and flint-mines of the Brecks represent them. There is no call upon him to do otherwise in a survey of a particular country. But when I argued with him that "neolithic" man was not a warring savage who gradually evolved a higher culture of his own initiative and through the survival of the fittest, but on the contrary a highly civilized and peaceful colonist from the Eastern Mediterranean who understood all about metals and whose culture steadily deteriorated into barbarism and war, because his institutions became inhuman and too complicated, he astonished me by thinking there might be something in it. He could not have amazed me more than if the Archbishop of Canterbury had refused to preside

at the ceremony of the trooping of the colours on the ground that it was incompatible with the Christian faith. For Clarke was a monarch of prehistory in East Anglia.

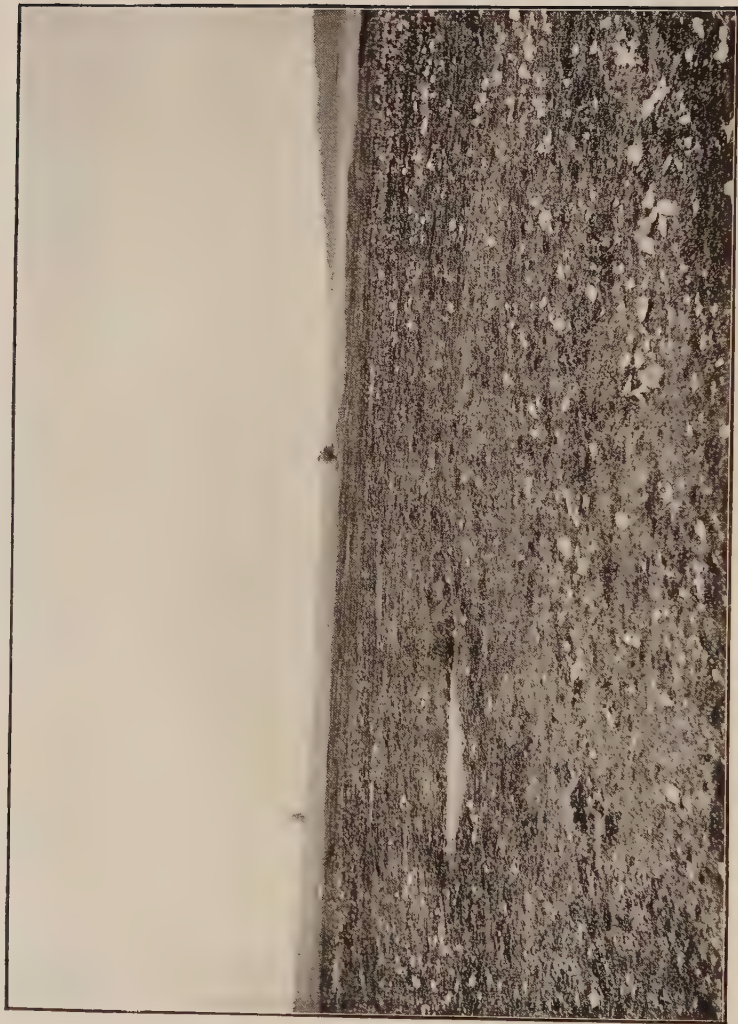
And lastly he differed from the average specialist in never losing sight of the general in the particular on the one hand, nor of isolating the emotional from the scientific aspect of his subject on the other. He knew that an accurate inventory of the spots on the stone-curlew's egg is not necessarily a passport to the living creature within. Clarke who knew so much had got a stage further than pure knowledge by his awareness that without feeling or understanding it is so much litter whose proper place is the dustbin. That is what makes this book of his so interesting, even though we may not be personally interested in the statistics of the crossbill or the Spanish catchfly. It all makes a kind of love-story, though the characters be the lapwing, the water-avens and the breathing wilderness rather than men and women. The wilderness is barren, useless and unregarded. But it lives, neither can we kill nor enslave that enduring life.

H. J. MASSINGHAM.

BARNES, S.W.



MAP OF BRECKLAND



A SOUTH-WEST NORFOLK BRECK

IN BRECKLAND WILDS

CHAPTER I

Breckland Characteristics

FEW of the lowland districts of England have more striking individual characteristics than the area known as Breckland, which comprises about 400 square miles, of which 253 are in south-west Norfolk, and 145 in north-west Suffolk, extending from Narborough on the north to Culford and Mildenhall on the south, from East Harling and Garboldisham on the east to Lakenheath and Feltwell on the west. The only towns within the area are Thetford, Brandon, Mildenhall and Swaffham, and it is less densely populated than any district between the Pennines and the New Forest. Omissions of the fen portions of the parishes of Northwold, Methwold, Feltwell, Hockwold, Brandon, Lakenheath and Mildenhall about balance the acreage gained by the addition of the "breck" portions of the Norfolk parishes of Marham, Narford, Barton Bendish, Caldecot, Stoke Ferry, Shropham, Eccles, Quidenham and Blo' Norton, and of the Suffolk parishes of Honington, Troston, Livermere, Fornham All Saints, Fornham St. Martin, Hengrave, Pakenham, Bury St.

Edmunds, Great Barton, Saxham, Risby, Higham, Kentford, Herringswell and Freckenham.

Breckland was one of the most thickly-populated districts in England in the various prehistoric periods and is still crossed by three prehistoric trackways, the Icknield Way, Peddar's Way, and the Drove, which are among the best preserved in the country. Much of it is heathland, and the roads are either open to the heath or bordered by hedges of dwarfed Scotch pine or spruce fir, of which there is a considerable mileage. It is the stronghold in this country of some of the rarest heathland birds; on its remarkable meres nest more species of wild duck than in any other place in the British Isles; and a number of plants, beetles and moths are confined to this district, where also flourish birds, plants, and insects usually restricted to the coast.

On the north it is bounded by the chalk country; on the east and south by boulder clay; and on the west by fenland peat. Its streams, the Lark, Little Ouse, Thet and Wissey are all clear rapidly-flowing rivers typical of chalk areas. Breckland itself is characterized by a remarkable pall of sand, covering chalk, gravel, sandy loam or chalky boulder clay. This sand is often only a few inches in depth, though a section at Elveden showed 15 feet, and there seems a general thickening eastward. It has aroused some amount of attention among geologists, but few suggestions have been made as to its origin. Mr. F. J. Bennet, F.G.S., stated that "the tract within which this sandy covering occurs is also that wherein the boulder clay is thin, patchy, and containing much sand; so that a good deal of the surface sand may have resulted from the weathering of the boulder

clay in a dry, treeless area, where sun and air would have a powerful disintegrating effect on the thin, sandy clay; whilst over these bare plains the winds would soon distribute a more or less general mantle of sand."

The geological evidence shows that at one time there was a ridge between Swaffham and Newmarket consisting of Kimeridge clay, lower greensand, gault and chalk. The great eastern glacier (F. W. Harmer) crossing from north-west to south-east across the present fen basin, from which it removed most of the Kimeridge clay, would cut away much of this chalk ridge and carry the detritus of the two formations to the south-eastern extension of its *moraine profonde*, as evidenced by the chalky boulder clay which overspreads so much of Suffolk. After chalk and gault had been in great part removed, the glacier would cut into the greensand but would not push the detritus so far, and this I take to be the very sandy chalky boulder clay of Breckland which contains a great deal of sand, with plenty of chalk, though usually in small pieces, and is so different in appearance from our ordinary clay, as hardly to be recognized as such. Much of the chalk is the comparatively soft chalk of the district, but there are also nodules of hard Lincolnshire chalk, tabular grey flint from Lincolnshire, and Neocomian erratics from the same area. While the glacial conditions continued, the chalk in this clay would not be affected by water, but when the warmer period recurred and the southern edge of the glacier began to melt, in its gradual retreat it would dissolve much of the chalk in such a porous matrix (the Kimeridgian detritus to the south-east would be more impermeable) and leave a surface covering of sand containing the flints and erratics of the

boulder clay. The streams from the edge of the glacier would probably be sufficiently strong to carry this sand some distance and re-deposit it over chalky boulder clay which had not been decalcified. With a loose soil in a comparatively treeless country there would tend to be further decalcification of the chalky boulder clay, and its distribution would also be affected by the wind, much of the present depth of sand in some areas having been undoubtedly blown there.

In his report on the sand above the chalky boulder clay at Grime's Graves, Weeting, Mr. Henry Dewey, F.G.S., said that the clay "left a residue strictly comparable with the sand which overlies the clay. There is therefore no reason why the sand was not derived from the chalky boulder clay by atmospheric leaching and solution of the lime." How remarkably this sand has been leached is indicated by various soil analyses. On Thetford Warren the percentage of sand and insoluble is 95·4; at Croxton 88·4, 92·1 and 93·8; at Brandon 63·5, 64·4 and 88·9; and at Methwold 93·47. Hardly any free carbonate of lime is present. In the Thetford Warren sample (an average of 18 tests) the percentage of lime was ·02, of phosphoric acid ·09, and of potash ·06. The organic matter was 2·1 and the moisture in an air-dried sample 0·8.

On this arid sand the peculiar characteristics of Breckland depend. It controls the natural (and to a large extent the cultivated) flora, which determines the species of insects which can flourish, and on these and the plants depend the mammals and birds. Agriculture past and present also owes its limits to the constitution of the soil, to which is due the number of settlements of pre-historic man, the parish boundaries, the huge area of

heathland and the almost innumerable heathland tracks which were the predecessors of the hard roads.

Charcoal found in the prehistoric flint-mines at Grime's Graves indicates that beech, Scotch pine and stunted oak were growing in the district during the Neolithic period, when the rainfall must have been greater than at present, and large herds of red deer could find sufficient nutriment. All the evidence, however, tends to show that during the historic period this was almost a treeless area, until planting took place on a limited scale towards the end of the eighteenth century. Most of the early plantings appear to have been of Scotch pine, which is still the characteristic tree of the district, planted either in rows known as "belts" or artificially dwarfed for hedges. At Santon Downham in 1909 I measured a Scotch pine which two feet from the ground had a girth of 16 feet, with six limbs each as big as an ordinary tree, towering to a height of over 60 feet. Increasing aridity of the soil owing to lower rainfall after the end of the Neolithic period has always limited the number of inhabitants who could wrest a living from its wastes. The 54 Norfolk parishes had a population of 20,792 in 1921 and the 21 Suffolk parishes of 11,492. For the whole of England the average population to the square mile is 669, but in the Norfolk portion of Breckland it is only 82 and in the Suffolk portion 80, while if the towns of Swaffham, Thetford, Brandon and Mildenhall are omitted from the calculation the population of the remaining 351 square miles is only 62 to the mile. The Norfolk parishes have an average area of 2,999 acres and the Suffolk parishes of 4,422 acres.

Most of the present village-sites, judging by the place-

names, appear to have been selected by the Saxons. Thirteen of the names of parishes end in ton and two in tone, 20 in ham, 8 in ford, 4 each in ing and well, 3 in wold, 2 each in den, hall, toft, don and ey, and 1 each in thorpe, worth, heath, wich, son and stow. The only other parish is Breckles. The importance of the river-valleys is demonstrated by the situation of the villages. One is associated with the Nar, 28 with the Wissey and its tributaries, 16 with the Little Ouse and its tributaries, 10 with the Thet and its tributaries and 9 with the Lark and its tributaries. There is also a remarkable regularity in the distance of these valley-villages one from the other, for taking both banks of a stream, the villages are mostly placed at two-mile intervals. The great ford at Thetford where the Icknield Way crossed the Little Ouse and Thet was one of the most important passages from Suffolk to Norfolk. There were also fords across the Lark at Lackford (on the Icknield Way) and Culford ; across the Little Ouse at Rushford and Wangford ; across the Thet at Larlingford ; and across the Wissey at Stanford, Langford, Lynford and Mundford. In every settlement a supply of water was the first necessity, and this was assured in almost every parish in Breckland by access to a stream. In some cases a portion of a mere served as a fairly good substitute, except in those recurrent periods of drought when most of the meres became dry. At the present day Hockham has not access to a stream or mere, but until 1795 the largest mere in Breckland was on the west side of the parish where there is still a swampy area. The parishes which apparently never had access to streams, meres or fens, number only four ; Swaffham in Norfolk, and Elveden, Ingham and Wordwell in Suffolk.

It was probably the desire to obtain water which accounts for the meeting of parishes at Rymer Point, 4 miles from Thetford on the road to Bury. In 1320 it was described as Ryngmere, and there is still a distinct depression at the Point, though "mere" may have had its alternative meaning of boundary, as no less than nine parishes here meet within a distance of a quarter of a mile, that probably marking the length of the mere. In the Breckland portion of Norfolk, the only comparable spot is Ringmere, where six parishes meet, and the flocks from Brettenham, which sends up a long tongue of land close to the mere, have the right to pass across the Kilverstone heathland in order to obtain water. Both Roudham and Bridgham, which are east of Peddar's Way, send long narrow strips across it to the westward in order to reach Ringmere. Heathland was also important for fuel, litter and pasture and there are one or more heath areas in every parish. Some of them which stretch from the river-valleys so as to include as large an area as possible of upland heath are long and narrow. Both Euston and Brandon have a length of 6 miles, and several other parishes but little less. Parish boundaries also indicate the importance of early trackways and lines of earthwork. Peddar's Way forms part of the eastern or western boundary of twenty parishes; and the Icknield Way of fifteen. Fincham's Drove, Longmoor Green and the Drove are also parish boundaries in part. Beechamwell is bounded by the Narborough Devil's Dyke on the west; Cranwich and Weeting by the Fendyke on the west, and Northwold, Methwold, Feltwell and Wilton by the Fendyke on the east; West Harling and Gasthorpe by the Garboldisham Devil's Dyke on the

east, and East Harling and Garboldisham by the same on the west. One of the lines of "Black Ditches" bounds Lackford and Cavenham.

Altitudes are low, below 200 feet except around Swaffham, and most of the area is between the 100- and 200-foot contours. Wide vistas are not, however, lacking, for in a district of low altitudes a rise of even 100 feet may reveal a wide extent of country. From the low hills near the fen borders—at Santon, Hilborough, and even from Swaffham—though the far-flung horizon may be almost lost in the haze of distance, the western tower and lantern of "Ely's sacred fane" looms upon the isle 20 miles away and appears to dominate the great fen plain.

Until the Inclosure Acts the cultivated areas were farmed on the open field system by which the arable fields were "shack" lands for six months of the year, and during the remainder were divided into strips of about an acre, held by various persons. Economically it was wasteful but it enabled a large proportion of the community to be agriculturists, and documents prove that land which is now apparently primitive heathland was profitably cultivated in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In those days the manorial value of marl was well-known, and some of the pits, the existence of which in the middle of heathy tracts is now almost inexplicable, were originally dug to obtain marl for the adjacent arable land. There was in 1338 a Lampythowe on Thetford Warren (marked Lambpit Hill on the O.S. map), and the original loampit to which the name refers is still a scene of occasional activity in the middle of that waste. The claypit between Croxton and Thetford was also referred to in 1509, and

the one by Thetford Workhouse was known as the "Fryars Calkepitt" in 1535. In a field called Sandy Bottom at Roudham there are five ancient marlpits, and "Labour-in-vain Plantation" in the same field gives some indication that the soil has not gratefully responded to the advances either of the agriculturist or arboriculturist. The sandy soil forms a perfect filter-bed absorbing water with great rapidity and even during the heaviest storms pools of water are not formed on the heathland. Even at the present day a gale will move a considerable quantity of soil, certainly from field to field and from field to plantation, and in some cases from parish to parish. The sand on newly ploughed fields is lifted up in dense clouds as high as the tops of the trees in the boundary belts and plantations, and looks from a distance like thick smoke. Fine sand is blown to a depth of an inch or more over large areas of heath and plantation. This process must have been much more frequent, as there is historical evidence to prove, in the days when the whole countryside was open, before the planting of the belts of Scotch pines and the plantations of larch and spruce. What are termed "sand floods" must have been a comparatively common experience. The best protection is undoubtedly afforded by the thick hedges of dwarfed Scotch pine, when these are kept in good condition, for they make excellent wind-shelters. The numerous stones found on some fields also serve a useful purpose, for they serve to retain a certain amount of soil. Their utility is obvious if such fields are examined after a gale, for all the loose sand between the stones has been blown away and the stones are left standing high and bare. Agriculture under such circum-

stances must always have been something of a gamble, and heavy land farmers who are at least always certain of finding their fields in their accustomed positions, would have their sympathy for the light land farmer increased after a walk over some of the areas which are cultivated under the most adverse conditions. "Rabbit and rye country" used to be the description applied to much of this area. That rabbits should flourish is understandable, but it is still a matter of wonder that even rye can endure the impinging of thousands of angular particles of sand, which in the course of generations give a lustre to all exposed flints.

Fields are sometimes unenclosed, or are bounded by earthen banks, belts of Scotch pines, hedges of Scotch pine or spruce fir, and occasional white-thorn. There are probably hundreds of miles of earthen boundary banks in the district. Some of those on the heathland are 6 or 8 feet in height. In some instances they mark parochial or hundred boundaries; of the remainder some perhaps marked the lines of trackways disused a thousand years ago; and others are the boundaries of the ancient common fields. Some are known to the warreners as "trapping-banks" presumably because they are favoured by rabbits for their burrows. Parts of almost every area of heathland were at one time cultivated, but have become derelict. Both these areas and the large sandy open fields are known as "brecks," and their number, and the fact that they are characteristic of all parishes, induced me in 1895 to give the district the name of Breckland.

The arable fields and their crops are as characteristic of the district as the waste lands. In the Suffolk Hundred of Blackburne in 1283 no wheat was grown in Barnham,

Euston, Rushford, West Stow and Wordwell. Rye was grown in every parish but only formed the largest stock in Barnham; barley in every parish and five times as much as wheat; oats and peas in every township, with oats next to barley as the dominant crop. In 1800 when the Bishop of Norwich prepared for the Government a return of the estimated yield of corn per acre in East Anglia, that for Thetford district was the lowest, the number of coombs per acre being 3 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ of wheat, 6 to $8\frac{1}{2}$ of barley, and 7 to $7\frac{1}{2}$ of oats. In 1872, Mr. S. B. J. Skertchly stated that rye was the dominant cereal; barley and potatoes of good quality were grown in places; lupins were extensively grown for sheep-feeding; and buckwheat—locally known as “brank”—seemed to thrive. Comparing Breckland with the remainder of East Anglia, beans were absent; mangolds, sainfoin, rotation grasses, vetches, tares, peas, and permanent grass below the average, rye, lucerne and rape above the average; barley equals the average. There is little wheat. Cattle and sheep are much below the average. Peas do well in a wet season, as also does mustard, of which a large acreage is sown for sheep feed. Clovers are disappointing, as they get burnt up or thrown out of the land by frost; lucerne when once established does extremely well as it is impervious to drought, but it requires at least 6 inches of soil above the chalk. Kidney vetch grows very abundantly and produces a heavy crop, while sainfoin does well and makes excellent hay. Lupin is another plant with a tap root, which grows well where there is nothing but pure sand, but where there is an admixture of chalk it is a failure. Mustard and lupins are often ploughed in to furnish humus. Swedes and

turnips provide fair crops when the year is wet, but mangolds do best on the average. Tobacco has also been grown successfully on the deeper sands in recent years.

Many of these crops furnish a prodigality of colour—the bright yellow of mustard in bloom, the orange of the kidney vetch, the cream of the buckwheat, the purple of the tares, and lucerne, the gold of melilot and black medick, the pink of sainfoin, the delicate rose-pink and the brilliant carmine of tobacco, red of Italian clover and the white of Dutch. Several of these crops may often be seen in juxtaposition, affording brilliant contrasts, yet merging into a harmonious whole. It would be unfair to classify as farm crops the charlock which tinges whole fields with yellow, or the poppies which sometimes run riot, yet these are important factors in the colour-scheme of the arable fields. Most of the fields are fairly large, but there is none to equal those at Northwold mentioned by Sir Philip Skippon in the 17th century, when men ploughed straight away for twelve furlongs.

The Forestry Commission has recently purchased about 20,000 acres of the poorest land in the district, bounded by the Thetford-Bury road on the east and the Brandon-Newmarket road on the west, and will convert this into the largest single forest created in this country in modern times. The principal plantings will be of Scotch, Corsican and Maritime pines. North-west of Thetford for about 5 miles there will be, following the chalk soil, a broad belt of beech, interplanted with larch. About 2,000 trees are planted to the acre, but ultimately these will be reduced to 200–300.

Footpaths are infrequent, as in days before the Inclosures the open heathland provided no obstacles for the

pedestrian, and communication between one sparsely populated settlement and another was infrequent. Commons also are few and in only two cases—Foulden Common, and Barnham Cross Common, Thetford—have any special interest, an interest, however, mainly botanical. On Barnham Cross Common which adjoins Thetford on the south is the stone socket of the ancient Franchise Cross which divided the Liberty of Thetford from the Liberty of St. Edmund. Botanically, the common occupies a position unique in the British Isles, for on no other does the typical Breckland flora occur. There are flourishing colonies of six of the restricted "Breck" species, the Spanish catchfly, sickle medick, least medick, field wormwood, perennial knawel, and wall bedstraw. The spring speedwell was formerly found, but is apparently extinct. With the exception of the bedstraw, these occur on the heath pasture, chiefly on banks and tracks where the competition from the furze is less keen. It would seem that the area of the original steppe flora has been greatly reduced by the encroachments of the furze and sandsedge, which have also acted detrimentally to the heather. In the spring the whole of the pasture area is covered with a white sheet of vernal whitlow grass. In addition to the ordinary plants of heath pasture, hounds-tongue, sheepsbit, purple mountain milk-vetch, rough clover, fine-leaved sandwort, naked-stalked candytuft, hairy bitter-cress and smooth bitter-cress are not uncommon. Few areas in East Anglia yield the botanist from outside its borders so many uncommon species of plants. Its bird life is that of an ordinary furze-clad common, with the addition of the stone-curlew and occasionally of the ringed plover. Linnets and meadow-

pipits are probably the most abundant nesting birds, the former in the furze and the latter in the long grass around it which is protected from grazing animals by the sharp spines. Sand-martins nest in the sand-pits, and wheatears occasionally occupy their disused tunnels. Other nesting birds include the lapwing, nightjar, whinchat, stonechat, bullfinch, whitethroat, willow warbler, and yellow bunting, while the marshy portion of the common is frequented by the common snipe. Among its bird visitors are almost all those found in the district, for river, marsh, pasture, furze, sandpits, whitethorn hedges, and the bordering pine-belts provide diverse attractions.

As in most districts the traditional building materials, whether for manor house, farm-house or cottage are provided by the accessible geological deposits. Flint, whether from the chalk, the boulder clay or the gravel, is the most important in Breckland ; indeed it is doubtful whether there is any parish which does not contain flint used in domestic architecture, and it is utilized in all the churches. Sometimes the flint is faced, but only in very rare instances is it squared, and most of the flint buildings have brick quoining. Some of the flints in buildings at Swaffham, Narborough, Cockley Cley and Mundford are large nodules of Lincolnshire grey flint derived from the chalky boulder clay and faced, while at Beechamwell the unfaced flints are stained red with oxide of iron in the gravels from which they were derived. Flint used in conjunction with stone taken from the ruins of monastic buildings provides a pleasing variation in Thetford, West Tofts, Croxton and Euston. Most of the cottages, and the church in Croxton are built of flint picked from the surface of the land, and this is typical of a number

of villages. On the western side of the district chalk is a very important building material. It is dominant in Northwold, is freely used in seventeen other towns and villages, the area in which it is common roughly corresponding with that in which the hard lower chalk, or "clunch" is obtainable by quarrying. Carrstone, or lower greensand, except for its use elsewhere for galleting, is in Breckland confined to Narborough, Beechamwell, and Shingham, and usually consists of small tabular pieces like those used at Downham Market, and not the large quarried pieces of the Snettisham district. Old brick houses are to be found in many of the towns and villages, though the use of bricks as a building material is not so general as that of flint. Red-brick houses mainly Georgian, beautifully mellowed by time, are the chief feature of the domestic architecture of Swaffham, and it is doubtful whether any other Norfolk town contains so many fine examples. In these days the possibility of pleasing variety in the use of bricks seems almost to have been lost sight of, but many of the older houses in Breckland show what excellent effects can be produced by alternation of colours and sometimes materials.

As a rule, the oldest cottages in the district appear to be those of stud (or lath and plaster), though a few of the older "wattle and daub" still remain, and externally it is difficult to distinguish between the two types. The stud house is generally timber framed, with nogging of clay, chalk and occasionally brick in accordance with the district, that is clay or brick on the eastern side of Breckland, and chalk on the western. Thirty-three villages contain stud houses which are most abundant on the

border-line of the boulder clay. Most of them are thatched, and coated in pink or yellow, though white is also used in the villages on the former Lynford estate, not only for stud, but also for flint and brick, and as a result Mundford, with its polychromatic decorations, looks the cleanest village in Breckland. In a few cases the timber framework of the stud houses is exposed, though these half-timbered houses are not a feature in a district where well-grown timber was scarce. Where these stud houses are the chief type of cottage architecture, some of them are ornamented by the process known as "pinking," which consists in making patterns on the wet slip with a brass comb. With the exception of a few old houses in Thetford it does not occur in the Norfolk portion of Breckland, but is common in Flempton. Par-geeting only occurs at Barnham on a cottage with two stories overhanging. Clay lump is naturally most in evidence in the cottages on the borders of the boulder clay area, though it seems to be used sporadically for out-buildings almost all over the district, and provides the dominant type of cottage at Great Hockham and Tottington. Galleting, that is the insertion of pellets in the mortar joints, partly to prevent the pointing from weathering, and partly to add to the beauty of the building, is confined to a limited district in the Norfolk part of Breckland. Carrstone galleting may be seen at Swaffham, Narborough, Beechamwell, Gooderstone, Northwold, Methwold and Feltwell; red brick, tile, and flint chips are used for galleting at Gooderstone; cinders at Northwold; and red brick, cinders, quartzite pebbles, flint flakes, and carrstone pellets at Feltwell, where galleting is most prevalent.

Subsequent chapters describe some of the peculiarities of the animal, bird and plant life of the district. Of the insects of Breckland Mr. Claude Morley, F.E.S., says, "it is not so much the hope of turning up insects which are found nowhere else that attracts the entomologist to this district as the unusual number of generally rare kinds to be met with within a small area." Three moths, *Dianthea irregularis*, *Lithostege griseata* and *Spilodes sticticalis*, are confined to the "breck" in this country; and *Tinea imella*, *Oxyptilus latus*, *Acidula rubricata*, and *Gelechia vilcella* are more likely to be met with here than elsewhere. There are other insects usually only found on the coast sand-hills and this also applies to several species of plants, to the ringed plover, and to eighty beetles which are attached to arenaceous soils. *Diastictus vulneratus* is a beetle first found at Brandon in June, 1902, by Mr. Morley and not since discovered outside the district.

The molluscan fauna of the heaths and warrens is meagre, only comprising half a dozen species. *Truncatellina minutissima* was first found in Norfolk as a living species at Two-Mile-Bottom, Thetford, in 1919, by Mr. H. Dixon Hewitt, although it occurred in abundance among the prehistoric chalk-workings at Grime's Graves. Two other species also have a special interest. The prevailing form of the shell of *Jaminia muscorum* on the Suffolk coast is devoid of denticles (var. *edentata*). At Knettishall most of the specimens have two denticles (var. *bigranata*) and at Brandon they are occasionally furnished with three teeth, and are of the form known on the Continent as *Jaminia triplicata*, Studer. This is a fairly common continental form, and was first found in England at

Lingheath, Brandon, by Dr. G. W. Chaster in July, 1904. In 1908 Mr. A. Mayfield and I found it on the Norfolk side of the Little Ouse on Santon Warren, among the debris, as at Brandon, of disused excavations in the chalk for flint. The other shell worthy of note is a small water-snail, *Planorbis vorticulus*, found as a fossil in the peat of the Little Ouse valley among shells, all others of which still exist in the neighbourhood. In England—with one exception—it has only been found in the fossil form, but it still lives on the Continent. It is very strange that these two continental forms should thus occur in Breckland.



LANGMERE



THE PUNCH BOWL

CHAPTER II

The Call of the Heathland

“**H**E who has once seen a ghost,” said Cardinal Newman, “is never again as though he had not seen a ghost,” and he who has once vibrated with the thrill of the heathland is never again quite the same. Almost fruitless is the attempt to analyse with accuracy the manifold beauties that in their totality make the charm of a landscape. More particularly is this the case with the large area of heath in Breckland. It fascinates but few, but those who have once come under its spell are ever after its slaves. Circumstances may compel them to live far away; towns and villages may temporarily form an impassable barrier of distance; yet though for a time the call of the heathland may come only as a faint murmur at the ivory gate, times are certain to recur when it is heard with appealing intensity, and it is felt that the hunger for the heathland must be satisfied.

“The heath admits few to its friendship,” says Halliwell Sutcliffe, “but it never falters in its choice.” Certain it is that a man who knows and loves the heathland always has with him the memory of its spaciousness, of its peaceful solitudes, of its heather and bracken and lichens and

wood sage, of the calls of its birds, and the scent of its air, with which he thinks there is none to compare. In the recesses of his memory he can always perceive its savage dignity in winter, its wide, brown slopes in spring, its delicate greenery in summer, the luxuriance of its autumnal vegetation, or the immutability which at any season of the year appears to be its eternal aspect.

“There’s the wind on the heath, brother; if I could only feel that, I would gladly live for ever.” So said Jasper Petulengro to Lavengro in one of the most memorable passages in George Borrow’s famous book. Life and death were in the thoughts of both. The Romany blood showed itself in Petulengro’s worship of nature. Sun, moon, and stars, night and day, were “all sweet things,” said the gipsy, adding, “there’s likewise a wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, who would wish to die, brother?” This charm of the wind on the heath is the delight of the few; it might be the delight of the many. Not that it is always kind to man and beast. Sometimes it chills to the marrow and seems to freeze the very vitals. But it is always free and unrestrained, sweeps across a large area, and plays havoc with any foes that attempt to stop its mad career. The wild, unenclosed heathland encourages breadth of thought. The man who constantly dwells in a district where all land is enclosed and fields are small, thinks in acres; he who lives near the open heath, thinks in miles.

The keen, cutting tones of the north wind, the caress of the south, the fierce squalls of the east, or the low whispers of the west, are here felt in all their intensity.

Under whatever aspect the heathland is attractive, but some seasons of the year are certainly more powerful in

their appeal than others. At all times there is the far-spread horizon, the "rondure of the illimitable blue," and the immensities of space which it seems to reveal. Like that of the rolling Downs, the beauty of the wide sweeps of heathland is feminine rather than masculine, although on drear days, when "the low winds make moan," there is a solemnity in the solitudes that is as impressive as the lowering crags and the shadowed rock-bound valleys of Wales or the Lake District. Yet when the sun is shining, and the breezes rustle softly among the fronds of the upspringing bracken, when there is "a haze on the far horizon," then there is peace on the gentle green-clad slopes. Here, as Mr. E. V. Lucas says of the Sussex Downs, there is "no sublimity, no grandeur, only the most spacious repose." The atmosphere is one of calm and deep peace, yet the magnitude of the outlook makes man feel his insignificance. He is merely an insect on the face of the wilds. He scratches the soil in places for a year or two. Nature laughs at him, and immediately his efforts cease begins to repair the ravages he has made. With grass of the field, tiny plants that push their rootlets into the softened soil, flowers that scatter their seeds abroad on the wide sandy acres, a coating of verdure is soon given, and a few years suffice to reclaim the heathland temporarily lost.

Whether covered by the snows of winter, swept by the bitter winds of early spring, bursting forth into the greenery of summer, or robed in royal purple in the autumn, the heaths have their own particular attractions, but they are at the height of their beauty in late summer. Then the bracken has attained a sturdiness that makes it a matter of the greatest difficulty to force a passage

through, while in the woodland glades where the tiny curling branches at the top are often seven feet from the ground, the adventurer finds himself in the semi-twilight of a tropical forest. Where these English tree-ferns do not hold sway, the ground is often covered with acre after acre of blossoming heather providing a feast of colour such as many people imagine can only be seen on the Yorkshire or Scottish moors. But here it is close at hand, set in the midst of a land almost primeval in its wildness, with an air as keen and fresh as that of the mountains.

Here we feel in touch with man in his early days, with all that is primitive and prehistoric. The tawny bents that border the winding cart-tracks in the sand, seem as though they must have been the product of a thousand years; the heathland road on which one may wander for mile after mile through parish after parish without seeing any human being, seems as though its only fitting user would be a skin-clad Neolithic hunter with his flint-tipped arrows; the shrill whistle of the stone-curlew and the pipe of the ringed plover sound to-day as they sounded in the far-off times when the clash of battle and the shouts of men engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle told of the fight for supremacy between Saxon and Dane; while the placid pools that lie in hollows on the heathland still mirror the giant pines as they did in the days when their ancestors were first planted on the barrows of men of the Bronze Age.

Certainly if he be akin with Nature any man may find peace in the heathland solitudes, where the dirge of the wind in the drear pine belts, or the call of some green woodpecker, as with wavering flight it passes from

plantation to plantation, are the only sounds that one normally expects to break the silence. For in September the great bird-chorus, which made music in the spring, has reached a period of rest. Many of the songsters are fitting to and fro in lands whose inhabitants are swarthy; the noisy croakers from Scandinavia have not arrived; and the native birds, with family joys ended for a season, have no incentive to pour forth the floods of melody which give so much pleasure to the wanderer in the countryside when the rising sap is changing the dun garb of winter to the green coat of spring.

In the autumn Nature turns the woodlands to gold, but the heathlands are vested in royal purple. Such a feast of colour is unknown to the dwellers on the heavy lands. Visitors may scoff at the wilds in the bitter winter days when the east wind cuts almost to the marrow, in spring-tide when the dainty green of the young bracken makes the heathland appear, from a distance, like a lawn, or in summer when the memory of the white dusty roads will not be effaced and the panting of the heat-exhaling earth overpowers the beauty of the scene, but when the pageant of autumn is at its height they have no words of scorn, nothing but inexpressible delight, for the real glory of the heathland must be felt not described.

Night on the heathland is an experience that appeals to all our primitive instincts. Here one seems in tune with the infinite, capable of communicating with the spirits in the stars, of hearing "as the roar of a rain-fed ford, the roar of the Milky Way," or of peering at the earth like "a feather floating in the gulf." The waste, as Thomas Hardy said of Egdon Heath, is majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic

in its admonition, and grand in its simplicity. It is possible to think clearly, with no distracting influence save the call of the wild creatures—the hoo-oo-oo-too-wit of the tawny owl, the shrill whistle of the stone-curlew, the wail of the lapwing like the cry of a lone spirit seeking a companion, the short plaintive note of a ringed plover, or the reel of a nightjar on some windbent pine. Calls of pheasants resound through the woodland silences; as a low undercurrent comes the far-off dreamy cadence of the wind in the ever-singing pines. The world is audible, but not visible. Rarely is a stone-curlew outlined against the apple-green afterglow in the western sky, occasionally the form of a spectral shadow-shape, a barn owl, appears against the darkness of the plantings, or the rustle of rabbits among the bracken is followed by a glimpse of a white scut dodging hither and thither. Or the sounds may have a deeper significance—the cry of a hare caught in a noose, a rabbit in the clutches of a blood-thirsty stoat, or the squeaking of a vole gripped by the talons of an owl. Partridges maintain a continuous clucking among the bents; a song thrush tries a few hesitating disconnected bars of melody; evidence of distant civilization is furnished by the baying of a dog and murmurs in the sheepfold.

Dawn certainly brings joy. Clear comes the black-bird's trill from the far-off woods, a sound that makes the calmness seem more deep; a thrush bursts forth into song from the clump of pines that crowns the tumulus where some warrior was laid to rest in the youth of mankind—voices calling from the outer world, imperious and profound. The edges of the trackway are covered with grey lichen cups, tufts of fine grass, and moss on which

the sunshine glints. Lapwings flash white against a stony "breck," or the empurpled distant woodlands touched with green. On a bare expanse a pair of stock-doves chase each other round and round the deserted rabbit-hole which they have made their temporary home. From a spectacular point of view the heathland is not at its best in spring. The swells seem bare, as the bracken which in early winter is still stiff and sturdy, is beaten down by the sweeping blasts until in the spring it lies battered and tangled and torn. In the golden days of summer, when the green bracken fronds are restful to the eye, the smell of the gorse and the wild thyme, of the sweetbriar and the pine unite to form a pleasant opiate, the harbinger of a desire

"To live and lie reclined

On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind."

From an ancient boundary bank carpeted with moss of velvet sheen, purple blooms of the aromatic thyme, and grass kept short as on a lawn by the nibbling rabbits, the rolling wastes of heathland lie before us. With such wide expanses of earth and sky merging together amidst the shimmering heat waves at the far horizon, the details of the landscape are difficult to detect. But near at hand trivial objects have vast significance. The tender green of a curled frond, the soft ooziiness of a marshy hollow, the hawthorns, and elderbushes, the startled hare or bolting rabbit, all add their quota to the wonder and incomprehensibility of it all. Wheatears take short flights on the sandy patches; stone-curlews rise close at hand, showing the white tips of their wings; lapwings run hither and thither on the bare breck half-way up

the opposite slope, and the call of the whinchat, like flint striking flint, carries our thoughts back to the day when these heaths were the homes of Neolithic man, and the grass-grown tracks his main roads. Days like this remain in the memory not so much on account of their incident as their perfect serenity.

Not that there is always peace. There come times when the winds begin to wail, and the angry storm-clouds cover the sky from horizon to horizon. Then there is the joyousness of battling with the breeze until almost breathless with the struggle, of knowing that the wild south-west wind which whistles in your ear was an hour ago 60 miles distant, of seeing everything but yourself bending to the fury of the blast. Some of the Viking blood whirls through the arteries; the deep diapason of the storm in the distant woodlands sounds like a saga of days of old, now inciting to further struggle with the elements, now recalling dim ancestral memories, and at length providing soothing satisfaction for a task accomplished.



MINERS' PICKS, GRIMES GRAVES



MINERS' PICKS IN APSE OF GALLERY

CHAPTER III

Aspects of the Heath

THE aspect of the heathland is always changing. It changes with the seasons, with sunshine and shadow, with snow and frost and rain. Whatever spring beauty the heaths lack in some directions when compared with the heavy land districts is atoned for by the contrasts between the spring garb of beech and larch and the sombreness of the Scotch pines and, as for blossom, nowhere in Norfolk or Suffolk do the crab-apple trees approach in size and mass of bloom those in Breckland. Some of the trees are 30 feet in height, with wide-spreading branches almost touching the ground, and billowing out from top to bottom with pinky-white flowers. The heathland is very slow to show signs of spring and when the bracken in the plantations is over a foot in height, that on the open heath is scarcely visible. Sere bracken fronds and rusty heather still give tone to the vegetation, and though some of the minute heath plants are in bloom, the chief beauty of the heathland is not yet obvious. Compared with the heavy land areas it seems devoid of flowers, for primrose-covered banks and cowslip-covered pastures are unknown. Yet even in spring there are compensations, unexpected

brilliances—the clustered masses of lesser celandine in the valleys, the rosy plumelets of the larch, the large patches of ground ivy, and acre after acre covered with the tiny blossoms of the vernal whitlow-grass, intermingled with the beautiful blue of the spring forget-me-not, the red-foliaged rue-leaved saxifrage, and the dingy spikes of the field wood-rush.

No human eye sees millions of the flowers that bloom ; no human ear hears the song of thousands of birds. Yet each flower gives something of its fragrance to the passing wind ; each bird adds to the flood of melody which surges through the land—a throbbing of life, a chorus of joy, an uprising of the elemental forces. New beauties are perceptible with each succeeding dawn,—a tinge of green here, a richer purple there, sun and cloud weaving the warp and woof of the panorama of colour in the landscape, flashing on the silver trunk of a birch or the ruddy richness of a Scotch pine or plunging the distant woodland into a haze of blue.

The colouring of the heathland in summer is more varied if less gorgeous than in autumn, yet the segregation of many plants gives brilliant patches, of brick-red sorrel, of blue common bugloss, of purple viper's bugloss, or red and purple hound's tongue. Heather and wild thyme are in blossom where the gorse and the bracken do not hold sway and shimmering heat-waves often lie trembling just above the earth, making the horizon vague and indistinct. There are days when in the small hours the sun rises into a sky of carmine and gold, tinging the cloud-billows floating in the azure with shades whose fleeting beauties the artist tries in vain to depict ; reigning unchallenged at midday high up in the rondure of

the empyreal blue ; and then at eventide sinking to rest in a blaze of splendour, with the western sky a sea of molten gold, and the eastern a vast lake of liquid ultramarine, every minute changing in depth and extent as the sun recedes from view below the horizon. On such days the pine woods set in the heathland have cool recesses where the sun does not penetrate. There is a solemn stillness and grandeur in the gaunt pines—a charm such as no other tree possesses. Lofty arboreal archways and columns form dim aisles stretching far away till lost in the haze of distance, where the wood appears a confused mass of green and brown. Bracken, like tree-ferns, stretches high above the head, with glades in the green whence the outside world is as naught, whilst rabbits rush headlong hither and thither. Through the foliage above, the sky appears in splashes and patches of blue and white, as the vapour-flecks scud from west to eastern horizon.

The solemn firs
Stand like sentinels dark and high,
And the wind continually moves and stirs
In their topmost boughs, a gentle sigh.

In a pine wood there is much less rustling than in other woods—a silence that can be felt, a silence which is almost oppressive on such a day. There is less surface on the leaves in a pine wood than in a plantation of almost any other tree, therefore the wind does not so much possess the power of making music save only in minor keys. On the ridges the wind sweeps along with nothing to check its onward course, over miles upon miles of heathland through the spreading cloisters of

the pine woods ; laden with the fragrance of gorse and heather and wild thyme, and with the more pungent smell of the young bracken, it seems to contain vitalizing properties.

When night falls on the heath there is never a light visible. Darkness is audible, perceptible, palpable, and the darkness of the heathland is intensified in the woods. At night the heath becomes colossal and mysterious. Familiar things put on a fantastic appearance. Great clumps of heather are like a flock of recumbent sheep. Rabbit-holes become black tunnels to an imagined underworld, the home of goblins, sprites, gnomes and fairies. They are also traps for the unwary. The foliage of the pines is like a cloud against the sky. What light exists is apparently strengthened by the waters of the stream which flows at the foot of the long heathland slope. It even reflects the shadows of the alders and reeds on the further shore. The sougling of the wind in the pines, its whisper among the aspens, the deep diapason of the far-stretching woodlands, are broken only by the cries of the creatures of the wilds—a rabbit caught by a stoat, or in its death agony in a noose of copper wire set at the bend of a run, the harsh call of a coot or mallard in the reedbeds, or the varied twitterings of smaller birds unsettled for a short period. Paths, familiar and apparently fairly level, in the night darkness develop unexpected protuberances and depressions. Walking is therefore in the nature of an experiment. One never knows where the next step will end. To wander a foot from the beaten track is to court disaster. Rabbit-holes, mole-hills, tree-roots, heather-tufts, grass-grown ant hills, ancient workings for stone, all conspire to alter the

pedestrian's position from the perpendicular to the horizontal.

A night-storm on the heathland is an experience not soon forgotten. The wind blows with terrific force; it is almost impossible to stand upright. Trees in the plantations twist and groan in torment; the woodland roars to the passing blast. Raindrops patter on the leaves like a continuous discharge of small shot, their fellows fall on the grass with tiny thuds, all merged in the great storm roar. In the occasional lulls some of the undercurrents are audible—the grating of the beeches, the swish of the firs, and the murmurous music of the aspens. Yet all this is quickly thrust into the recesses of memory when the sun rises over the swelling eastward heights. That is when the heathland is at its best. Mystery has receded, the face of the landscape is open and smiling. The heather dominates the vegetation of the heathland. By the green trackways the heather shoots have been nibbled short by the rabbits and are only distinguishable at a casual glance from the tawny bents by their deeper green. The grass itself is springy to the foot, more springy perhaps than to the foot of the Neolithic hunter, for it grows on the tomb of scores of generations of its ancestors. Yet there is no real turf, and nowhere more than a foot of sand above the chalk and the gravels. Heather has grown into huge bushes, sometimes 3 feet in height, where left undisturbed.

The heathland is, however, indubitably at its best in autumn. Though much wider stretches of heather are obtainable on the Yorkshire and Scottish moors, the colouring there is no more brilliant, and perhaps loses

something in intensity by the absence of contrasting vegetation such as is always to be found in Breckland, either in the great wastes of bracken, the waving tresses of the yellow bents, the greys of the lichens, or the belts of Scotch pines. The heaths consist of ridges, valleys, knolls and hollows, and the effects of sunlight and shadow and tones conferred by distance are therefore the more diversified. Often there is a tawny slope of "breck" or primeval heathland, perhaps diversified with patches of heather glorious in all the purple majesty of autumn. On one heath the heather is nearly all green and closely cropped by rabbits; on another the giant tufts make progress extremely difficult, their thick woody branches pulling up the unwary pedestrian with a sudden jerk, while on another the brilliance of the purple blossoms is toned to a delicious softness by the tall white bents which overtop and dim, but do not obscure, the more lowly heather. Sweeping over the big heather tracts the wind brings a dainty fragrance; in some of the hollows among the uplands, almost shut off from the outer world, there seems a concentrated essence of its characteristic smell. Big bracken patches are on some areas yet green, but on others they are gorgeous with all the golden autumnal tints. Many of the mixed plantations are a blaze of varied tints, from the fiery red of the beech and the amber of the maple to the lemon of the poplar, and the contrast of these with the darker hues of the Scotch pines, and spruce firs accentuates their beauty.

Storms on the heathland are awe-inspiring. One particular day I recall on which there had been a heaviness in the air, a warning of trouble to come. Around the horizon the grey mist was banking up into semblance

of clouds which covered the setting sun as with a pall. Gloom filled the air, and gloom settled on the souls of men. Who could be mirthful in such an atmosphere, under a lowering sky ? Now and again there came a flash of light from the cloud-bank on the southern horizon, but the rumble of the thunder was lost in space. Dusk deepened into darkness, and the haunts of men were only evidenced by the light reflected over the brow of the hill, and the distant murmur as of a sullen swarm of bees, or the gurgling of a streamlet in an underground pool. Our footsteps on the hard road were reverberated from the pine plantation, and we stopped by the lichen-covered palings. We knew where lay beneath the veil of mist the distant heather-covered Suffolk Warren ; the flowing river in the valley, and nearer still, in Norfolk, the dark straggling pine belts. A dim glimmer from the top of the opposite slope came from the warrener's lodge—a signal in the night. A night all too still ; a calm that was weird. Small sounds were worrying ; one would have welcomed a loud noise. The dropping of an acorn with muffled thud ; the patter, patter, of a dead leaf as it was bandied from bough to bough on its descent to Mother Earth ; the squeaking of a rat, the rustle of a hare or rabbit through the long grass, the flutter of a roosting bird—these maintained the tension. The silence penetrated every fibre ; it would have seemed presumption to talk louder than a whisper. One minute there would be an impenetrable darkness on the earth ; the next, the lightning would illuminate the whole horizon. The rolling thunder was within hearing, rumbling over the southern ridge. Almost incessant was the lightning. During the flashes there appeared

mysterious forms and shadows in the woodland glades. Vision said they were hobgoblins, elves, sprites of the forest; reason said they were trees and bushes. And ere vision could decide, the wood lay again in the deep of night.

But hark! there is a sound in the far distance—a dull roar. One could feel that a spirit was moving on the earth. Nearer and nearer it came; every living thing seemed to have been forewarned. Clear on the night air came the “Chalk-up, chalk-up” of a pheasant from the pine belt on the borderland of heath and breck. And then—Babel—a confusion of tongues. It was as though Roderick Dhu had blown the fateful whistle, and

Instant, through copse and heath arose
Bonnets, and spears, and bended bows.

From every plantation came the scream of the pheasant; overhead and all around was the lapwing's plaint; and shrill and piercing in its intensity came the whistle of the stone-curlews from every heath, warren, and breck within audible radius. Skirting the wood came a vague shadow, with eyes scintillating in the gloom, and one could not repress a momentary start at the mournful “Hoo-oo-oo-too-wit” of a tawny owl. A brighter flash than usual silhouetted its form against the dark background of pines; then it was lost in the darkness. With eyes and ears on the alert we awaited a repetition of that uncanny “Hoo-oo,” but in vain. A moment later we had lapsed into somewhat of impassiveness, when not a yard behind us came that eerie note again, like the wail of a lost spirit in the avian Gehenna. Need

one confess to a start, a quickening of the heart-beats? The croak of a moorhen far down in the valley came up on the storm vanguard of wind. From a calm, in which every voice of the night was distinct, to a raging gust which seemed to shake the solid earth—all in a minute. It was of short duration. The roar that presaged the storm, and the wind that whipped the oak leaves round and round and buffeted them hither and thither was soon far away beneath the night-pall. There was but a gentle murmuring in the tree-tops, a peaceful caressing, in partial atonement for the past. One could again hear the scurrying footsteps of the field-voles, or the sharp squeal of a pugnacious rat. Darker grew the night, sharper the lightning, louder the thunder, until even the birds of the air knew not whither they went, and lapwings were wandering round and round over the lights of the town in the valley until far on into the night, when the rearguard of the storm had passed away to the northward.

Late summer and autumn are also the period of heath fires—fascinating yet terrifying spectacles. On an August day, mountains of black and yellow smoke rose above the pine-belts on a distant ridge for several hours, and as their volume did not lessen, towards nightfall I set out to trace their origin. Early in the afternoon a spark from a passing engine on the railway had ignited the dry tawny bents which in turn had fired the bracken, browned by days when the heat was of almost tropical intensity. A steady breeze from the south-west kept the flames on the move, and in the six hours during which the fire raged, over one hundred acres of heathland were swept bare. I tried to make a beeline from the

white chalky highway to the nearest line of flame, perhaps half a mile distant. Rabbit-holes made pitfalls for my feet; mole-hills were a cause of stumbling in my path; the wiry stems of the heather endeavoured to detain me; but all these were of little account compared to the dense forests of bracken, nearly 6 feet in height, dry, tough, and intertwined so that every foot of ground had to be strenuously contested. And a man caught fast—as at one time I feared would be my own case—in the midst of one of these thickets, in front of the rapidly-advancing flames, would have stood every chance of being burned to death, as progress was almost as difficult as in the dense undergrowth of some tropical forest. Ultimately, however, clearer country was reached and curving lanes among the bracken led round to the flames. Long before these were met, the crackling of the burning brakes could be heard like the continuous firing of thousands of pistols. This particular line of fire was then about 100 yards long, sweeping forward almost as fast as a man could walk, sending up thick clouds of smoke lit up in the gathering gloom by the many-tongued fire beneath. It was an impressive scene, and the impression it made was deepened by the dusk and the bands of flame crawling along distant parts of the heathland. It was quite impossible to tell by vision whether these fires were beyond pine-belts in the far distance or were merely behind—as was in reality the case—bracken about half a mile away. So deceptive was the scene. A gang of men were at work in the quarter I had reached endeavouring to extinguish the flames. There were eight of them at one end of the line, and while three with shovels dug up the sandy soil

and smothered the fire, the others beat out the flames with boughs and so gradually reduced the length of the onrushing line. Slowly they gained the mastery, and as the belt of flame grew shorter they worked with redoubled vigour, and ultimately gained the victory. All commented on the myriads of insects that the fire drove out, particularly among the heather, where the bees were almost innumerable. The most curious incident noted was that of a hare which remained in its form so long that when it at length fled its fur was ablaze. Maddened by the pain it tore off at tremendous speed, doubtless to die a lingering death somewhere among the bracken.

The heathland in winter is mainly a dingy russet—bracken and heather giving the prevailing tone. There is little protection from wind or weather, and before the days when trees were planted, there are records of persons losing their lives in time of snow through wandering from the track. After a slight fall of snow cultivated land or unenclosed brecks on the heaths are easily distinguishable as white patches, the snow on the rougher parts being almost hidden by the vegetation. Snow on the heathland provides evidence of much almost unsuspected animal life. Here are the footprints of the hare, the forelegs close together and from 12 to 20 inches between the leaps; rabbit tracks doubling and crossing each other in all directions, and indicating which burrows are inhabited; a furrow with faint claw-marks alternating on either side as evidence of the passage of a mole; faint claw-marks in a long paw-print, and tail-tracks of the brown rat, while the forelegs of the water-vole are placed closer together and their hind legs further apart. Among bird-tracks those of the

pheasant are unmistakable—a three-pronged indentation with a continuous line between the footprints caused by the drooping hind-claw. When the meres have been frozen and snow-covered, herons, rabbits, hares, waterhens, pheasants and water-voles have crossed and indented the snow, so that when the snow is melting the hardened footprints remain in relief.



RINGMERE FROM THE NORTH-EAST



THE DRY BED OF FOWLMERE 1902

CHAPTER IV

Flowers of the Wild

FEW districts in England possess a flora with more fascination for the botanist than that of Breckland. That of the marshes and the river-valleys differs but little from that of the usual East Anglian fens, but the heaths, the brecks, the arable fields and the waysides have a flora which is to a considerable extent peculiar to the district. Large areas of heathland are covered with bracken, heather and sand-sedge—locally known as “net-rein”—and there is evidence that bracken and sand-sedge are extending at the expense of heather and grass-heath. Somewhat curiously heather is almost always pure, that is it is not intermingled with the heaths (*Erica cinerea* and *tetralix*). The former does not occur, and the latter only on a few small areas, such as Fenhouse Heath, Brandon. Heather is commonly known by its old Norse name of ling and we have Ling Farm at Garboldisham, Ling Heath at Tottington, Linghills Farm at Great Cressingham, and Ling Heath, Brandon. Bracken retains its old name of brakes, and there is a Brake Hill at Swaffham. Rights of bracken cutting have survived on a few heaths as on Lakenheath Warren where there are eighty-four “rights,” the lord of the manor holding

the largest number, entitling the holders to cut brakes and sand-sedge after August 29. Each right-holder is supposed to have ten acres. Some areas of heath are covered with gorse and broom, but bracken is much more abundant.

Rabbits exercise a great effect on vegetation. When they were killed off on the Shadwell estate, vast quantities of oak and furze seedlings sprang up all over the heaths, and the season after such a procedure had been adopted on Thetford Abbey Heath its appearance was so changed as to be almost unrecognizable. An unusual phenomenon was also furnished by the ploughing of Rushford Heath—which had been fallow for about twenty years—in the winter of 1904–5. In the following autumn it was covered with a dense growth of mignonette intermingled with nodding thistle, field scabious and lady's bedstraw. Before it was ploughed I had been over each year for several years in the autumn and had noticed no mignonette, yet suddenly on the soil being disturbed it covered scores of acres as thickly as though it had been planted. One can only surmise that the seed had been lying dormant for a long period. The following year the heath was sown and only a few mignonette plants have since been observed. In 1668 Sir Thomas Browne said, "this groweth not far from Thetford and Brandon, and plentiful in neighbour places."

When land ceases to be cultivated or the rabbits which convert the warrens into sandy steppes are killed off, the first vegetation which appears is lichen, moss and stone-crop. On some hundreds of acres of Thetford Warren after the rabbits were destroyed there was an extraordinary growth of lichen. Where the lichen and moss

are longer established and prevent the moisture in the thin layer of surface soil from being entirely evaporated, annuals spring up and perennials establish themselves. Among those earliest noticeable are ragwort—locally “canker-weed”—which in autumn covers with a golden mantle field after field which has gone out of cultivation. When the Inkerman breck at Santon was reverting from arable land to heath, Mr. W. H. Burrell, F.L.S., noted trailing pearlwort, storksbill, stonecrop, naked-stalked candy-tuft, field lady’s mantle, lesser cudweed, ragwort, field wood-rush, sheep sorrel, silvery hairgrass, florin grass, and various species of moss and lichen.

Grass heath yields a remarkable variety of flora which is not obvious without close inspection. In spring, patches of turf between the bracken areas are covered with a heliotrope network of wild thyme, and here and there in the shelter of the heather are tufts of wild pansy, the flowers of large size and evidently in a most suitable environment. In Santon there is a large colony of an extremely rare variety, *Viola Curtisii* var. *Pesneauri*, usually found only on sandhills by the coast, and even there confined to a few localities. Several species of small sedge grow on the heath, and the wax-like beauty of their blossoms well repays detailed examination. A close inspection of a square yard of turf reveals scores of minute blossoms. Plants which in other localities would be four to six inches in height are here not more than an inch. The white blooms of the vernal whitlow-grass contrast with the red of the sheep’s sorrel, so small as to be difficult to distinguish from the red leafage of the mosslike tillæa which clothes many of the trackways with sheets of red, as though the stains of fighting in

the prehistoric days had never been obliterated. The dainty blue blossoms of the spring forget-me-not, the white star of the smallest of the chickweeds, the blue and yellow petals of the changing forget-me-not, the hoary redness of the stems and foliage of the rue-leaved saxifrage, the curious looking heads of the field wood-rush, the deep blue of the field speedwell, small flowers of the cranesbill, some of them white instead of pink, the clustered flowers of the naked-stalked candytuft, the deep pink of the spring vetch, and the hairy grey foliage of the cudweed, all less than 2 inches in height, all grow in a square yard of turf which appears quite flowerless until carefully examined.

Within the British Isles a number of plants are confined, or nearly confined, to Breckland. Dr. J. E. Marr, F.R.S., has pointed out that steppe conditions existed subsequent to the glacial period, that fossil steppe mammalia occur in England, and that steppe plants must also have occurred here. There are survivals of the glacial flora, and it is more probable that there are survivors of the subsequent steppe flora. In Breckland there is the nearest approach to steppe conditions to be found in the British Isles, and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that a steppe flora would persist longer in this area than in others. It is probable that after the last glacial period steppe conditions were prevalent over a large part of north-eastern England, but where the soil was more fertile and the rainfall greater, scrub or forest would succeed and tend to the gradual elimination of the characteristic steppe plants. Wherever scrub was prevented from establishing itself by the poverty of the soil, composed of sand and associated with a low rain-

fall, the steppe flora would tend to persist. This probably accounts for the existing outliers of the steppe flora, the conditions in most of the localities where these plants are found closely resembling those under which they flourish in Breckland.

The special "breck" species number nineteen.

1. Conical Catch-fly (*Silene conica*). Recorded for 12 vice-counties. Of the 37 Norfolk and Suffolk parishes for which it is recorded, 31 are in Breckland.

2. Spanish Catch-fly (*Silene Otites*). Recorded for 3 vice-counties. Of the 36 parishes for which it is recorded, 34 are in Breckland and the remaining 2 in Cambridgeshire.

3. Umbellate Holosteum (*Holosteum umbellatum*). Recorded for 4 vice-counties. Of the 7 British records (all but one in Norfolk or Suffolk) one is in Breckland, but Dr. A. G. Tansley tells me that "it used to occur on thatch in the Breckland district, and as it is a well-marked plant of the North German heaths, which apparently show the nearest affinity with the Breckland heaths, it seems probable that it was essentially a Breckland plant so far as this country is concerned, and that it got from the heaths into the rye-fields, perhaps, and so on to the roofs with the straw."

4. *Medicago sylvestris*. Recorded for 4 vice-counties. Of the 29 British localities, 20 are in Breckland.

5. Sickle Medick (*Medicago falcata*). Recorded for 5 vice-counties. Of the 77 British localities, 43 are in Breckland.

6. Bur Medick (*Medicago minima*). Recorded for 10 vice-counties. Of the 39 Norfolk and Suffolk localities, 30 are in Breckland.

7. Mosslike Tillæa. (*Tillæa muscosa*). Recorded for 8 vice-counties. Of the 81 Norfolk and Suffolk localities, 27 are in Breckland.

8. Wall Galium (*Galium anglicum*). Recorded for 10 vice-counties. Of the 23 Norfolk and Suffolk localities, 15 are in Breckland.

9. Jersey Cudweed (*Gnaphalium luteo-album*). Recorded for 3 vice-counties. Of the 7 British localities, 4 are in Breckland.

10. Field Artemisia (*Artemisia campestris*). Recorded for 3 vice-counties. Of the 18 British localities, 17 are in Breckland.

11. Fingered Speedwell (*Veronica triphyllos*). Recorded for 7 vice-counties. Of the 40 British localities, 20 are in Breckland.

12. Vernal Speedwell (*Veronica verna*). Recorded for 4 vice-counties. Of the 21 British localities, 17 are in Breckland.

13. Spiked Speedwell (*Veronica spicata*). Recorded for 4 vice-counties. Of the 21 British localities, 19 are in Breckland.

14. Common Rupturewort (*Herniaria glabra* var. *vera*). Recorded for 4 vice-counties. Of the 26 British localities, 10 are in Breckland.

15. Perennial Knawel (*Scleranthus perennis*). Recorded for 4 vice-counties. Of the 25 British localities, 10 are in Breckland.

16. Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari racemosum*). Recorded for 3 vice-counties. Of the 19 British localities, 14 are in Breckland.

17. Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*). Of the 53 Norfolk and Suffolk localities, 12 are in Breckland.

18. *Carex ericetorum*. Recorded for 3 vice-counties. Of the 6 British localities, 4 are in Breckland.

19. Boehmer's Phleum (*Phleum phleoides*). Recorded for 7 vice-counties. Of the 35 British localities, 19 are in Breckland.

In most of these cases the comparisons greatly minimize the much greater predominance of the plants in Breckland, where parishes are much larger, stations more numerous, and individual plants in many cases numbered by the thousand. I know of areas where *Medicago sylvestris* and the sickle medick have almost excluded other vegetation; many miles of heathland track where one is never more than a few yards from the moss-like tillæa; several localities where the Spanish catch-fly is so abundant as to appear a hay crop growing to a height of nearly 2½ feet; a station for the spiked speedwell where there are over 1,400 plants; a station for the Jersey cudweed, with an average of 24 plants to the square yard over a considerable area; and several localities where *Phleum phleoides* is the dominant plant.

Holosteum umbellatum is now probably extinct, but was formerly found on walls, which is still the habitat for the wall galium. The fingered speedwell and the rupture-wort are almost confined to arable land in certain stages of cultivation, and the remaining species are found either on heaths or old "brecks."

I have worked out the distribution of these plants according to parishes, and this admirably indicates the limits of the steppe flora, the inner area in which the species are commonly found, and the outliers where only one or two species occur. Of the 19 species mentioned, 16 have been recorded for Mildenhall, 13 for Icklingham

and Lakenheath, 12 for Eriswell and Bury St. Edmund's, 11 for Thetford, Barnham, Cavenham, Culford, Tuddenham, and Brandon, 10 for Elveden, 9 for Croxton and Barton Mills, 7 for Narborough, Rushford, Cranwich and West Stow, 6 for Santon, Weeting, Lackford, and Risby and 5 for Kilverstone, and Wangford. Where the nearest approach to steppe conditions has persisted, the flora more nearly approaches the steppe character. This may be seen at London Bottom, Icklingham, where the sparse vegetation partakes of a downlike character. There are similar conditions at Cranwich. Field southernwood, which is naturally a plant of the steppes, persists in places where the soil is unbroken, such as the unploughed balks and heathland banks.

Certain plants usually associated with the sea-coast are found on the sands of Breckland. I am one of those who have considered that these were survivals of the period when the fen-basin was occupied by sea, and the valleys of the Lark, Little Ouse, Wissey and Nar formed maritime creeks. But additional facts have come to light, and on a reconsideration of the evidence I think that the sand itself is the chief factor, and that it is unnecessary to postulate any ancient association with maritime conditions. These plants are Golden Dock (*Rumex maritimus*), Sand-sedge (*Carex arenaria*), Sand Phleum (*Phleum arenarium*), Grey Aira (*Corynephorus canescens*), and *Festuca ambigua*. The two last-named grasses are rare, both in Breckland and elsewhere. The sand phleum is common in Breckland wherever the soil is disturbed, and is rarely found inland in other districts. Golden Dock is confined to the margins of the meres, but is not specially restricted to the sea-coast, occurring in

many inland localities outside Breckland in Norfolk and Suffolk. Sand-sedge is one of the dominant plants of the Breckland heaths. It is obnoxious to rabbits and is therefore extending at the expense of heather and grass which the rabbits eat.

Chalk is so thinly masked by sand in some parts of the district, and in a few places outcrops, that plants specially associated with the formation are not uncommon. The distribution of the chalk flora has been influenced by quarrying, and more particularly by ancient earthworks which are often made of chalk. This is noticeable at Thetford Castle Hill, the Devil's Dykes between Weeting and Cranwich, and Beechamwell and Narborough, the Black Ditches on Cavenham Heath, among the debris of the prehistoric flint-workings at Grime's Graves, Weeting, and to a lesser degree in connection with many ancient boundary-banks. On the big heathland areas it is usually possible to map the distribution of drift deposits by the absence of calcicole plants, and the dominance of calcifuges like bracken, heather, wavy aira (*Aira flexuosa*), matgrass (*Nardus stricta*), and gorse and broom. Plants characteristic of the chalk are dyer's rocket, cut-leaved mignonette, pyramidal orchis, rock-rose, common hippocrepis (*Hippocrepis comosa*), purple astragal (*Astragalus danicus*) dropwort, salad-burnet, squinancy-wort, small scabious, clustered campanula and marjoram. Rather than make an arbitrary selection of plants confined to calcareous soils, I have selected those found in Breckland from lists given by Dr. A. G. Tansley, and Messrs. J. F. Bevis and H. J. Jeffrey, and for which localities are given in the floras of Norfolk and Suffolk. These number 25, and thirteen species

have been found in Swaffham and Mildenhall (16 is the most in any one parish in Norfolk, and that is at Ringstead), 10 at Foulton and Thetford, 9 at Cranwich and Elveden, 7 at Cavenham, 6 at East Harling, Narborough, Weeting, Brandon, Great Fakenham, Icklingham and Tuddenham, and 5 at Roudham, Thompson, Barnham, Culford and Santon Downham. Of the mosses, *Hylocomium rugosum* is frequent on the limestone of the north, and in Norfolk is apparently confined to Cranwich, Santon, Thetford and Weeting. *Ditrichum flexicaule*, var. *densum*, is only recorded for heathland at Wretham. There are a few lime-loving species of plants which are not found on the chalk, but occur on the mortar-joints of walls. The only occasion on which the lime polopody (*Phegopteris Rovertiana*) has been found in Norfolk was on a bridge over highly calcareous water at St. Helen's Well, Santon. Water apparently ascended the bridge by capillary attraction and formed limestone stalactites on the inside of the arch.

Other rare flowers of the brecks are the small alyssum (*Alyssum calycinum*) which grows in sandy fields between Wilton and Weeting; the hairy genista (*Genista pilosa*) which has been recorded for several parishes, but is now probably extinct; the field melilot (*Melilotus arvensis*) a much smaller plant than the common melilot, but more frequently found in Breckland; the prickly lettuce (*Lactuca Scariola*) which occurs in a few old pits; and the rare grass, *Apera interrupta*. The lesser rue (*Thalictrum minus*) is common on earthworks and in some chalk-pits; the pasque-flower (*Anemone pulsatilla*) on some of the chalky pastures in the Suffolk part of Breckland, and the spring potentil (*Potentilla verna*) in similar localities.

Two of the rare fumitories (*Fumaria parviflora* and *F. Vaillantii*) sometimes occur; the round-leaved geranium (*Geranium rotundifolium*) grows in abundance on a roadside bank in Thetford; the narrow-leaved hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*) occurs on sandy fields; and the bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*) has also been recorded.

Among the more widely-distributed species, the hound's tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), locally known as the "little burdock," is one of the most characteristic. White bryony climbs over the Scotch pine and spruce fir hedges, and in some places mounts fir trees and hawthorn bushes to a height of twenty feet, its yellow foliage and scarlet berries forming a brilliant contrast in the autumn. The most brilliant colouring is furnished by arable fields when they are allowed to lie fallow. One of these adjoining Peddar's Way at Illington was covered with such a dense crop of white campion that it almost appeared that it must have been planted. Here and there were large patches of camomile, even purer sheets of white blossom, which the scarlet of the poppies and the purple and blue of the viper's bugloss only served to accentuate. Examination of the undergrowth showed that a number of other flowers managed to maintain the struggle for existence. These were the soft-leaved cranesbill, common bugloss, hop trefoil, thyme-leaved sandwort, scarlet pimpernel, upright cudweed and bladder campion.

In August the dominant colour on many heaths and brecks is yellow, which is provided not only by the ragwort, but by lady's bedstraw, birdsfoot trefoil, sickle medick, least medick, melilot, flaxweed, mignonette,

stonecrop, black medick, kidney vetch and hairy-leaved hawkweed; viper's bugloss, common bugloss, greater knapweed, musk thistle and field scabious are purple, though each is a different shade; white and bladder campion, yarrow, basil thyme, Dutch clover and thyme-leaved sandwort are white; the conical catchfly, rest-harrow and storksbill, pink; the poppy, scarlet; the blue fleabane, blue; and the hound's tongue a rich mauve.

There is a striking tendency to white-flowered forms of many species. Most heaths have a few plants of white heather, and I have also noted white specimens of the storksbill (in many areas more common than the pink), the centaury, basil thyme (as common as pink and purple), self-heal, corn cockle, harebell, and greater centaurea.

The alien Canadian fleabane (*Erigeron canadense*), which first appeared in Norfolk in the early eighties at Croxton, has also become a striking feature in the plant-life of the district, giving some of the sandy areas a decided tinge of green when the young plants come up in the spring. It abounds everywhere, from the dwarfed specimens three or four inches in height on the heathland, to those 2 to 3 feet high on cultivated ground. Gardens and waste ground in the towns and villages are afflicted by this plague; it grows by every roadside, on heaths and warrens, and on the borders of some of the cornfields is taller and more luxuriant than the crop itself. Numerous aliens sprang up during the war on the sites of military camps at Thetford, Barnham, Narborough, and East Harling—at least fifty species have been recorded—but the only one that has persisted is *Sisymbrium Altissimum*.



PEDDAR'S WAY



PEPPER HILL, WEETING

CHAPTER V

Heathland Birds

WITHIN six miles of Thetford 196 species of birds have been recorded, and of these the considerable proportion of 103 nest in the district. In the whole area of Breckland, the number of nesting species would not be increased, and additions to the list of those recorded would only consist of casual visitors. Birds of the heathland are naturally the most characteristic in a district which contains at least 74 named heaths and warrens, some of them several square miles in extent.

Pied, grey and yellow wagtails are common on the heaths in April, but later on are to be found by the streams. The first-named nest in the hedges of Scotch pine and spruce fir, where they often have for companions the missel-thrushes and turtle-doves, which are extremely common in the district. Stock-doves nest in the rabbit-burrows, and when searching for flint implements on the sand thrown out, I have often been startled by the sudden rush of a big bird from the depths, and have noted the low flight of a stock-dove making for the shelter of the nearest belt. The short-eared owl also occasionally nests in rabbit burrows. Wheatears are among the most common and most characteristic denizens

of these wilds, though they are more frequent where rabbits abound, utilizing a deserted burrow for their nest. On Barnham Cross Common most of the nests are in the tunnels bored by the sand-martins in the sides of the sand-pits. In the gorse clumps nest the whinchat, stonechat, linnet, and hedge-sparrow, with the ubiquitous blackbird and songthrush; white-throats and blackcaps favour the bramble tangles; while the bents of the heathland shelter the nests of the meadow pipit, woodlark (which is here more common than elsewhere in East Anglia) and skylark. Nests of the pheasant, partridge and red-legged partridge may be found in all kinds of situations, the two latter sometimes utilizing a joint nesting-place. In autumn the most common heathland bird is the green woodpecker, which the heathland wanderer frequently disturbs from its feast on an anthill, and its curious note, wavering flight, and beautiful colouring at once betray it as the "yaffle."

The wail of lapwings wheeling round is among the most frequent calls of the heath in the months of spring, and there are few prettier wild life scenes than a pair of baby lapwings which will lie so still that one might almost believe them to be dead, until conscious that they are being observed they will run away at full speed and perhaps fall into some hollow and roll over and over until breathless. They are cleanly birds and may often be seen bathing on the margins of the meres, and when they collect in flocks of several hundreds in the autumn, present ever-changing aspects as they perform graceful evolutions against a dark background of pines. Another nesting bird of the heathland is the yellow bunting, which at Brandon is known by the curious local name of "guler,"

and nests in the older and more bushy heather clumps. In the autumn common herons are not infrequently flushed from bare spots among the bracken on the heathland where they apparently spend the hours of rest.

Among the rarer visitors to the heaths and warren may be included almost all the raptorial birds—the white-tailed eagle, harriers, buzzards, and the peregrine falcon, while the osprey is occasionally seen fishing in one or the other of the meres. Sand-martins nest in sandy patches wherever there is a sandy section in a pit.

Woodland birds include a great number of willow wrens, for it is probable that they are here as abundant as anywhere in England, a few nightingales, redstarts, jays, carrion crows (which usually nest in small clumps of Scotch pine trees) long-eared owls and ring-doves. One of the most local of the nesting birds is the crossbill, which has nested at Santon Downham for many years, though sometimes its numbers are greatly reduced. At West Wretham I have known of eight nests in half a square mile.

The stone-curlew and the ringed plover are the two most characteristic birds on the Breckland heaths. In his fine book on *Nature in Downland*, Mr. W. H. Hudson says :

“Of the species that have been extirpated on the downs, just now one is inclined to most keenly regret the stone-curlew, not only because it is a fine big bird, singularly interesting in its habits, and possessing a powerful wild cry to gladden the souls of those who hear it, but also because its loss is so recent. During the last quarter of a century it has trembled on the verge of extinction, and I think I can say with truth that it is now, like the great bustard, nothing but a memory.”

At present, most fortunately, there appears no indica-

tion of its probable extinction in Norfolk, but should such an event occur in the course of years, the heathland would lose one of its most attractive denizens. Though in 1866 Mr. Henry Stevenson said that in Norfolk it was yearly diminishing in numbers, and in other parts of England is now rarely seen except on migration, it appears to hold its own in Breckland, and its shrill call, whether weird and wild under a grey sky, or jubilant in the moonlight or sunshine, is one of the most thrilling summertime sounds of the heaths. The whistle of the Norfolk plover, stone-curlew, or thick-knee, is typical of the freedom of the wild, the heart of solitude, spaces where the wind wanders sobbing and wailing, belt-enclosed areas where there is limitless silence, or mingled disquiet and expectation as the heath varies with the changes of the day.

The first stone-curlew graphically described to British ornithologists was a specimen killed near Thetford in 1674, a drawing of which was forwarded to Ray by Sir Thomas Browne, of Norwich. In Britton's *Description of the County of Norfolk* this is described as a "petrified curlew," a ludicrous error perpetuated in Hunt's *History of the Ancient Capital of East Anglia*. The main body of these migrants usually arrives in East Anglia from North Africa about the last week in March, and departs at the beginning of October, but isolated specimens, or parties of two or three, have been noted in every month of the year. On their first arrival and for five or six weeks afterwards, their whistling is very frequent, although the note is blurred. During this period, too, they seem to frequent the uplands by night, in preference to the river-side marshland, their querulous notes sounding from all quarters.

Against the dark pines they look almost white underneath when in flight, and when they alight it is with outstretched wings. They run a few yards on the ground with wings overhead before the impetus is checked and the wings folded. When wishing to shun observation the old birds will lie squat and motionless, but not with head and neck outstretched as do the young later on. Their plain plumage so closely resembles the short russet vegetation found in their haunts, that it is often possible to look at one without distinguishing it from its surroundings until some chance movement betrays it, when with its highly developed shanks it will scuttle away so rapidly as soon to be lost to view, or silently take flight just over the tops of the bracken. A night on one of the heaths—such as Santon Downham, where about thirty pairs nest yearly—in mid April, is a remarkable experience, for half a dozen of the birds start whistling in concert, their note sounding like “Willie Re-e-eve” (one of their local names). As one ceases its place is filled by another, so that there always seem to be about half a dozen making the silences of the night vocal, while in momentary cessations the voice of their kin comes from across the river valley, and from the miles of heathland stretching away towards the Lark.

About the first week in May, when the duties of nidification are begun, the cry is at first short and distinct, then shrill and continued. Two eggs are laid in a hollow scraped in the bare sand of some heath or warren, occasionally lined with a few bents. The ground tint of the eggs is stone-colour, marbled and spotted with dark brown, and laid, as they usually are, on heaths and brecks where flints abound and pebbles are common, they are

well protected from the average passer-by. It is a remarkable fact that, like some other migrants, the stone-curlew appears to return every year to within a few yards of the same spot for the purpose of nesting. The late Professor A. Newton told of one which when its native heath was enclosed and planted, rather than move a few yards from the spot where it had previously nested, forgot its native suspicion and the traditions of its race, and laid its eggs in thick cover.

While nesting they are very shy, and when disturbed fly away silently, skimming the bracken fronds until a belt is reached, when they will swerve upwards and pass over. The depressions in which the eggs are laid vary much in character. Some are narrow and a couple of inches deep, others broad and so shallow as hardly to be discernible from the ordinary surface of the heathland. The two eggs laid in each nest are quite different in character, one being usually much lighter than the other, and the small end of one egg is always placed against the large end of the other.

About two hours after sunset, the birds may be heard following their accustomed lines of flight from the heaths to the river-side marshland, or to the meres. Stevenson was unable to determine what amount of truth there was in this nocturnal "flighting" to the alluvium, but it is an undoubted habit in Norfolk and Suffolk, while in addition it may often be noticed after a rain-shower, when their whistling is also frequent.

The brood is generally hatched off by the commencement of June, but at the beginning of September I have found young birds, at most not more than three or four days old, so that probably in some instances a second

brood is reared. So well does the colouring of the young birds—a very light brown with zigzag lines running down the back—harmonize with that of the heathland that it is a matter of extreme difficulty to detect them. It seems to be their rule to take care of themselves on the approach of danger, their parents doing likewise.

In the *Fauna of Norfolk* Lubbock says that they were sometimes observed in flocks of from 80 to 100 prior to their autumnal migration, but personally I have never seen a flock containing more than 30. On one breck at Wretham at the end of August I have disturbed flocks of 25 and 30, and 10 solitary specimens, a total of 65 from one breck. The apparent diminution in the size of the flocks may perhaps be due to the fact that whereas in Lubbock's time the country was practically bare, and formed one vast heath, numerous plantations of quick-growing trees now divide the heathland into sections, and it may be that only the birds of these smaller sections at present flock together. These flocks may be seen and heard together in the daytime, but after dark one never hears more than a pair calling together from any one quarter. These flocks seem to have arbitrary preferences for sheltering among particular patches of bracken, and those with local knowledge usually know where to find them, whereas at this time of the year a stranger might walk over hundreds of acres of heathland and be convinced that the curlews had all migrated.

The stone-curlew is a very wary bird, and it seems probable that any reduction of its numbers in Breckland will be occasioned by the breaking up and cultivating or planting some of the heathland areas. More than anything else the agricultural operations were responsible

for the extinction of the great bustard as a breeding bird in East Anglia, and the stone-curlew has been banished from some of the heaths broken up of late years.

In the spring the mellow whistle of the ringed plover is not infrequently heard on the seashore, its usual nesting site. Norfolk and Suffolk are, however, noted among ornithologists for the fact that in these counties this typical bird of the seashore also nests thirty to forty miles inland. There is little doubt that those which annually return to the heaths of Breckland in the early months of the year are the descendants of a race which has long utilized this locality for nesting purposes, and it is highly probable, as stated by the president of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society in 1879, that with the death of the last of the heath-loving plovers would cease altogether the inland appearance of this species. They have a wide range in Breckland, and from February to August their dissyllabic whistle is one of the most pleasing bird-notes of the district, but it is rarely heard after the latter month. Their arrival from the sea coast is usually some time in February; but some were seen on Stanford Warren soon after Christmas, 1834. In the Lark Valley they nest on the heaths and brecks of Icklingham, West Stow, Cavenham, and Mildenhall; in the Little Ouse Valley at Thetford, Santon Downham, Santon, Weeting, Lakenheath, and Wangford; in the Wissey Valley at Mundford, Stanford and Bodney; and in the Nar Valley at Westacre. They are, however, by no means restricted to the river valleys, and on any suitable heath or breck on the intervening table-lands the wandering ornithologist may, in the nesting season,

be surprised by a black and white bird that apparently suddenly appears in the air, and flies round and round him at no great distance whistling continuously.

It appears to have a preference for derelict "brecks" where the white stones spotted with black lichen render it extremely difficult to detect the eggs. Both the ringed plover and stone-curlew nest on sandy soil and have sandy-coloured eggs. Those of the ringed plover are more visible on the newer "brecks" and as a rule they seek those which are stone-covered. Here both adult and nestling birds are protected by their resemblance to the lichen-spotted stones, and the eggs by their likeness to the sand in which the nest is made. Young ringed plovers are spotted, and this increases the difficulty of detecting them. The instinct which leads the ringed plovers and their offspring to return year after year to nest in the same spot seems to be most persistent, and with many of the old heaths now enclosed and cultivated, nests are not infrequent on arable land. When a "breck" which has been frequented for years by ringed plovers is again brought under cultivation, the birds sometimes change their nesting sites to a more suitable place in the vicinity. Some years ago three pairs nested on a stone-covered breck on Roudham Heath, adjoining Peddar's Way. When this land was cultivated once more they changed their nesting site to a spot a mile westward near Langmere.

The merest hollow in the sand is utilized, very rarely lined with a few short pieces of dried grass or small stones, from which the ringed plover derives its local name of "stone-hatch" which is commonly used in all its inland breeding haunts, though "ring dotterel" is occasionally applied. If one wanders too near the nest, both birds will

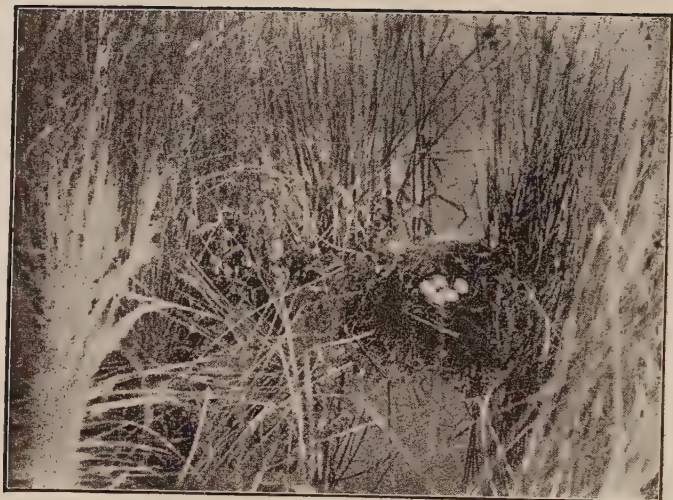
fly round and round the intruder, uttering their short mellow whistle. If there should be nestlings, the parents will feign a broken wing and flutter along the ground—anything to draw attention to themselves rather than to their young. These tactics, however, are not always successful, and the men who can find the nest of a lapwing by the actions of the hen bird can in like manner find that of the ringed plover. I have, on various occasions, disturbed the nestlings, which squat and lie perfectly still, rendering them so indistinguishable—though I have known they must be within a yard or two—that it was only by examining every inch of the ground as though searching for a minute flower I was able to detect them. Unlike the young lapwing, which under similar circumstances calls loudly and protests vigorously, the young ringed plover submits quite passively to handling and examination.

J. D. Salmon, F.L.S., described the ringed plover as “very abundant” at Thetford in 1836. Though they occupy a wide area in the nesting season they can scarcely be described as abundant at the present time, as it is rare to find more than two or three pairs nesting on the same heath or breck, and I believe that a reasonably accurate census of all the inland-breeding ringed plovers could be made by any skilled observer during a week or two of the nesting season. Without the slightest pretension to having made such a census, I should estimate that the number to be found between the valley of the Nar and the valley of the Lark, between Old Buckenham (where they have been noted) and the fens, is not more than 400 pairs, or an average of a pair to a square mile throughout the whole of the district.

Until a few years ago the generally accepted reason for the inland-breeding of these shore birds was that they were descendants of a race which nested on the shores of the Wash in post-glacial times, and that their nesting-places were coast sands. This view was strengthened by the statement of Sir Thomas Browne that the shore-nesting sheld-duck formerly bred in rabbit burrows about Northwold and other places, and by the presence on these inland heaths of several species of plants and insects otherwise restricted to the sand-dunes of the coast. It is quite obvious, however, that these sands were not in any way due to the action of the waters of the Wash, and the presence of plants, birds and insects at places which under any circumstances would have been several miles distant from the ancient coastline, renders this theory difficult of acceptance. Further, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the sand-sedge, which is one of the typical coast-plants, is found on the Lower Greensand at Congham, Leziate, Roydon, Grimston and Castle Rising, and near Farnham in Surrey, and sand and not sea is evidently the cause of its perpetuation in these inland regions. Loose, blowing sand containing many stones forms the desired nesting habitat of the ringed plover, and where this is found outside the breck area, as on the greensand which forms the higher part of Grimston Warren and Roydon Common, the ringed plover also breeds. Its food, which consists of small crustacea, insects and worms, would be as abundant inland—substituting mollusca for crustacea—as on the coast.

Another bird which finds the combination of heathland and pine plantations irresistible is the nightjar, which is fairly plentiful during its short stay in this country. It

arrives early in May—I have not seen it before the 7th—and during the next three months the churring may be heard almost every night. Within a distance of 100 yards I have heard five of these birds crooning at Two-Mile-Bottom, Thetford, and between Wilton and Weeting. The two eggs are laid on the bare heathland, and so wonderfully do they harmonize with their surroundings that even if one observes the flight of the bird from its eggs, the only certain way of finding them is to mark off an area of a few square yards and carefully scrutinize every inch. Continued hour after hour the churring can become very wearisome. Fifty yards away from Little Lodge Farm, Santon Downham, is a fine Scotch pine which was a favourite crooning spot for nightjars, and so maddening did the persistent sound become that a former tenant shot several which were more than ordinarily loquacious. The house is between the river and the marsh, and to ensure quietude at night during the nesting season there would have to be a terrible battue. I remember one night there at the end of May when all the stone-curlews of the neighbourhood shrieked from dusk to dawn, nightjars churred from every belt, ringed plovers whistled as they changed quarters and the plaint of many lapwings was rarely stilled. Before dawn the cuckoos and the snipe had started and with the first gleam of daylight “all little birds that are” filled the air “with their sweet jargoning.” In appearance, in song and in habits, the nightjar somehow seems alien to our English bird-life, but it is nevertheless one of the most attractive of our summer visitors.



LITTLE GREBE'S NEST



GADWALL'S NEST

CHAPTER VI

The Meres and their Bird-life

BOTH to the geologist and the ornithologist, as well as to the lover of the picturesque the meres of Breckland are remarkably attractive. On the Suffolk heaths there are a few small pools, but the largest and most typical of these curious natural sheets of water number ten and occur in five parishes in the Norfolk portion of Breckland. West Mere, Tottington, is a comparatively small mere, not easy of access. Stow Bedon Mere is gradually growing up, and of the five acres within the banks there is only about one acre of clear water. A colony of the Italian variety of the edible frog has been known here for a number of years. Hill Mere ($8\frac{3}{4}$ acres), Rush Mere ($4\frac{1}{4}$ acres), West Mere ($2\frac{1}{4}$ acres) and Mickle Mere ($29\frac{1}{4}$ acres) are situated within the park at West Wretham and are not accessible to the public. A decoy with ten pipes was constructed in Mickle Mere about 1836 and has been worked very successfully. It contains pike (one weighing 29 lb. has been caught), carp up to 10 lb., rudd, roach, perch, bream and eels. Otters and badgers have been seen ; cormorant, smew and goosander have been shot ; ospreys have been seen ; and most of the ducks which breed on the heathland meres also nest

here. Evidences of lake-dwellings have been found in both West Mere and Mickle Mere. In West Mere beneath 8 feet of mud, bones of the red deer and long-faced ox were found in 1851, with a wall built of flint and portions of a rudely-constructed ladder, while in Mickle Mere oak-wood piles, shaped and pointed, were discovered in 1856.

Of the five heathland meres Home Mere is situated on Thorpe Heath, West Wretham, and has an area of $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres. It is bordered on the north and west by a row of Scotch pines. Ringmere adjoins the highway from Thetford to East Wretham; Langmere is north of the Drove (a public trackway dating from prehistoric times) in East Wretham; Fowlmere is north of the Drove and is partly in West Wretham and partly in Croxton; while the Devil's Punch Bowl is south of the Drove in Croxton. These three may be seen from the green trackway.

Ringmere is a placid pool embosomed in a circular hollow with steeply-sloping sides, and when full has an area of $6\frac{3}{4}$ acres. Historically the adjacent heathland was the scene of one of those terrible battles between Dane and Saxon. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that after Easter in the year 1010 A.D., the Danish army "came to East Anglia and landed at Ipswich, and went forth to where they understood Ulfkytel was with his force. This was on the day Primo Ascensio Domini" [May 18th]. Milton, in his *History of England to the Norman Conquest*, says that "they came to a place called Ringmere, where they heard that Ulfketel with his forces lay, who with a sharp encounter soon entertained them; but his men at length giving back through the subtlety

of a Danish servant among them, who began the flight, lost the field, though the men of Cambridgeshire stood to it valiantly." Roger of Wendover adds that Thurkytel, the man who played the traitor, was the son of a Dane, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that "The flight first began Thurkytel Mare's-head."

The Norse skalds, in order to add to the glory of St. Olaf, include Ringmere among his victories, although it had been fought four years before he (as Olaf Haraldsson) came to England. Samuel Laing, in his translation of the "Heimskringla," has the following from the saga of Sigvald :

"To Ulfketel's land came Olaf bold,
A seventh sword-thing he would hold ;
The race of Ella filled the plain,
Few of them slept at home again ;
Hringmara heath
Was a bed of death ;
Haarfager's heir
Dealt slaughter there."

Another Norse skald, Ottar by name, sang :

"From Hringmar field
The chime of war,
Sword striking shield
Rings from afar ;
The living fly,
The dead piled high,
The moor enrich,
Red runs the ditch."

From the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* it appears that the slain included "Aethelstan, the King's son-in-law, and Oswig and his son, and Wulfrie, Leofrine's son, and

Eadwig, Aelfric's brother, and many other good thanes and people out of number." The writers add :

"The Danes had possession of the place of carnage, and were there horsed, and after that they held sway over the East Angles, and for three months harried and burned, ay, even into the wild fens they went, and there slew men and cattle, and burned throughout the fens ; and Thetford they burned, and Cambridge."

Topographically, this position has much to recommend it. Ulfketel gathered together the men of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire. The first-named would come by the old road from Norwich through Rockland, and from the northern parts of the county by Peddar's Way ; the men of Suffolk would also come by Peddar's Way, which crossed the Little Ouse at the ford of the Blackwater on the bounds of Rushford and Riddlesworth ; while the men of Cambridgeshire would come either by the Drove from Hockwold, or the Icknield Way from Royston and Newmarket—all these important early trackways meeting on the huge tract of heathland surrounding Ringmere. Peddar's Way would also provide a means of approach for the Danes on their march from Ipswich.

In the year 1724, Salmon, the author of *Roman Stations in Britain*, described the mere during one of its dry periods. He said, "On the side of this way from Hockham, in East Wretham parish, is a remarkable cavity called Ringmere Pit, it is in form of an amphitheatre to the bigness of six or seven acres, with an uniform descent on every side to the arena. So exact is its figure, even yet, one cannot help believing it was contrived for show. There was not, in the latter end of October, a drop of water in it, which the wet summer must have

filled, if it ever had been a pond. More of this kind I have heard of hereabouts, but not seen." In 1739 the Rev. Francis Blomefield described it as "a very old mere or large water, as the Saxon name which it still bears tells. Ringmere being no other than the Round Mere or Water." As to its being dry, there was, he said, nothing uncommon in this to those acquainted with it. It was generally full of water, and the ground being a sand, occasioned the uniform descent. He continued thus: "It is supplied with land-springs from the adjacent hills, which in the extreme dry year ceased running, and so the water shrank into the sand." When a schoolboy at Thetford he had caught fine perch in it, and thought it was artificially stored with fish after being dry. He was informed that the fishery belonged to the lord of East Wretham.

Langmere is less than half a mile north-west of Ringmere, and between the two, on a higher level, are two ponds, one by the side of the highway and the other used for sheep washing, which have never been known to become dry, containing a good depth of water when the basins of the neighbouring meres are quiet empty. Here the black-headed gulls nest sporadically.

Langmere is of oval form, and when full contains about 12 acres, is a quarter of a mile from end to end, with an island in the centre on which are eleven Scotch pines said by tradition not to have been planted by man. When the waters recede, the island becomes a peninsula, to which stock are driven across the isthmus and securely folded within a natural enclosure. It is the most impressive of the meres, and solitary hours spent on the tumulus-like knoll which is sometimes an island, watching the

ducks through field-glasses, have imbued me to the full with its weirdness and loneliness. Around are the gaunt pines with their mournful murmur, and a wild growth of elders, ragwort, and thistles; below are the waters of the mere, with ducks scattered over the surface; to the north a black plantation of scattered Scotch pines; east and west wide stretches of heathland; and southward apparently interminable pine belts. Here are truly

Misty deeps of pure unruffled water
Within a withered land.

When Mr. C. J. Staniland, R.I., visited the mere in July, 1887, he described it as "lying in the midst of a wild scrubby heath, not a sound but the melancholy wailing of the peewit or the scream of a gull to break the silence; the dozen or so of fir trees on the peninsula standing up in solitary grandeur against the sky. The immediate surroundings of the mere a dried-up, starved, stinky growth of thistles and what-not."

Fowlmere, the largest of the heathland meres (when full it is about 18 acres in extent) lies about a mile west of Langmere on the northern side of the "Drove" road, which connects them with a narrow strip of velvety turf, bordered by wide areas of bracken and heather. It is in a shallow depression, bounded on the east by a chalky pine-crowned bluff, and on the west by a crescent-shaped belt of alders, larches, and willows, rising tier upon tier in billows of green and gold and purple when the trees are in bloom. At the northern end green pastures slope from the mere to Fowlmere Farm, and to the south there is a rise about 50 yards in length to the ridge on which

runs the "Drove," while about an equal distance beyond lies the Devil's Punch Bowl Mere. Connecting Fowlmere and the green road is a cart-track, at the foot of which, close by the water, one may lie in peace during a south-westerly gale, with the nearer portion of the mere almost devoid of a ripple, while in the belt of Scotch pines behind, the wind roars and rages and the swaying branches bend to the blast. The northern half of the mere is undoubtedly the deeper, as the southern half freezes sooner. In common with a few others I have enjoyed delightful skating on this mere, when every part has been absolutely safe, and the rhythmic clanging of the skates on the frozen surface reverberated in musical cadence from the wooded shores. On one occasion two of us were the solitary skaters on its 18 acres of ice throughout the day.

This mere is also noted for its fish, and two Thetford anglers lost their lives here through the capsizing of their boat in June, 1842. Where the mere only occupied a small area before becoming dry in 1859 it was netted by a Croxton man, who secured 12 stone of fish, but in 1897 one angler secured a hundredweight in a day. Perch and pike have been obtained in some numbers, but the mere has been noted for its tench, which have been caught up to 3 lb. in weight. At least 150 good-sized specimens were found lying dead on the shore when the mere was very low in September, 1899, and as many more had been visible before the heavy rains of the preceding two or three weeks. At that time the dog of the shepherd who lived in one of the cottages adjoining the Punch Bowl, would enter the water, pursue the sluggish tench until it had caught one in its mouth, and bring it to land.

In 1834, J. D. Salmon, F.L.S., wrote in his diary concerning Fowlmere: "There are an enormous number of tench, perch, and some carp in it. I believe no other fish. None of them are very large; it is supposed in consequence of their being so numerous." He then mentions the fact that he saw a greenshank, but could not learn that it had ever nested there. "This," he continues, "I had from a man who had lived in a cottage near by 40 years, and walked round the mere every Sunday. His grandfather remarked that when the mere is very high wheat is dear, and on the contrary when the water is low." Economic conditions in the nineteenth century proved this theory to be fallacious. In 1859 the mere was dry, and wheat £11 per ton; in 1884 it was full to overflowing, and wheat was £8 19s. per ton.

The Devil's Punch Bowl, the smallest of the heathland meres (when full it has an area of about an acre), lies a short distance to the south-west of Fowlmere, on the opposite side of the Drove. It is circular in form, and the best example of the crater-shaped mere. It is in the midst of a square of Scotch pines, between which and the edge of the rim is level turf on two sides, on the third giant bracken and elder bushes, and on the fourth a couple of cottages, the home of a shepherd and a gamekeeper, supplied by a shallow well which is never dry, even though the deeper bed of the mere may be. From the edge of the rim there is a sharp descent of from 20 to 25 feet, forming the huge circular basin which popular fancy pictured as the Devil's Punch Bowl, over which in dank autumn evenings sometimes hangs a coronal of mist known as the "Devil's nightcap." The slope is partly clothed with turf and partly with bracken, below

which is a pebbly beach bordering the weird-looking pool.

The water in these meres is subject to remarkable fluctuations. With the exception of Mickle Mere they have no visible inlet or outlet. There can be no doubt that their waters are derived from the chalk and that as the saturation-level rises in the chalk by which they are surrounded, so also do the waters of the meres increase in depth, and as it falls so do the waters decrease in depth. When the saturation-level is below the bed of the mere then they become absolutely dry. This has occurred on a number of occasions. Geologists suggest that they originated from "pipes" in the chalk filled with drift-sand. After heavy rains these would become full of water so far as they were affected by the level of saturation in the chalk. As this level rose so would the waters ascend, and thus enlarge the areas until the basins were formed. On the neighbouring heaths there are numerous hollows of all sizes which appear to have originated in this way.

In one of Kilverstone "Registers of Baptisms" are the following entries, probably by the Rev. Thomas Methold :

"1830, July. Ringmere Pit was so full with water that it overflowed the Hockham Road, the water being for several weeks two feet deep on that road.—1835, September. Ringmere Pit entirely without water.—1844, January. Ringmere Pit again overflowed the Hockham Road to a greater degree than in 1830, and so it remained till September of this year."

On August 2, 1835, J. D. Salmon, F.L.S., wrote in his diary, preserved at Norwich Castle Museum: "Ringmere Pit very dry, only a small pool of water a few yards in length and breadth, and not more than a few inches in

depth," while on August 24 it was quite dry, as it was again, in 1859, when the bed of the mere was covered with a dense growth of giant nettles. When the members of the Ordnance Survey visited the district in 1882, the meres were very full of water, and Ringmere was about 250 yards long and 150 yards wide.

From 1859 to 1901 the waters of the mere had many alterations of level, but in September, 1901, became quite dry, and so remained for two years. In May, 1902, there was no vegetation on the mud which formed the bed of the mere, but this had dried and fissured all over as one might suppose would have been the case from a miniature local earthquake. The bed of the mere was fairly level save for a place about 6 feet across and 6 inches deep, possibly the remains of some excavation at an earlier dry period. In September of the same year it was covered with a closely-matted growth from a foot to 18 inches in height of nettles, thistles, persicaria, and curled dock, while on the old margin was an abundance of scorpion grass and golden water-dock. Throughout 1904 the mere was quite full, but in the autumn of 1905 again became dry. In the early part of February, 1906, it was once more fairly full of water, but was dry at Christmas 1909 and 1910, though full during the summer months. From 1912 to 1920 the waters continued at a very high level, the moorhens and coots nesting in the furze branches overhanging the mere. During 1921 and 1922 Ringmere was extremely low, and the dried mud here and at Langmere was covered with a liverwort (*Riccia crystallina*) not previously recorded for West Norfolk. The mere has gradually increased in area since 1923. There seems no doubt that the rainfall, so far

as it affects the level of saturation in the chalk, is solely responsible for the fluctuations of water in this and the other heathland meres of Wretham. The water in the well at Larkshall Cottages, over half a mile distant from Ringmere, rises and falls at the same time as the water in the meres.

The height of the water in Langmere is subject to variations in a similar manner to that of Ringmere, though there are not so many early records. Bryant's map of Norfolk in 1826 showed all the meres full with the knoll at Langmere as an island. It was quite dry in 1859, 1894, 1901-3, 1905, and 1909, and nearly so at the end of 1911, but the water was very high in October, 1912, only a few feet of the top of the island showing above the mere, though a certain number of rabbits seemed to eke out existence on the scanty vegetation among the pines. It continued very full until 1920, but in October, 1921, was quite dry. By the middle of May, 1922, there was water in the hollow north of the knoll and it continued low until the autumn of 1924, and in March, 1925, the knoll was again an island.

The first season that Langmere becomes dry the bed is simply a waste of mud and sand. The next season it is covered with grass, and is the playground of hundreds of rabbits, while it is everywhere undermined with mole-runs, so much so that it is impossible to find a clear space of a foot square not thus tunnelled. The next year, persicaria, dock, and goosegrass cover the bed of the mere, and when the water rises on the north side of the knoll, the long pool is filled from end to end with amphibious persicaria, which, when in full bloom, makes a covering of Oriental brilliance and delicacy.

During the recurrent dry periods the bed of Fowlmere is of sufficient extent to make its cultivation profitable. Tradition records that during one of these periods it was planted with oats which were never harvested owing to a sudden influx of the waters. During the dry spell in 1859-62 it was planted with oats, wheat, and vetches, but as the last-named did not flourish they were mown and cabbages substituted. It was quite dry in 1824-5, 1859-62, and 1901-3. In 1902 the occupiers of the Wretham and Croxton portions each planted about 4 acres of beet, swedes, and cabbages, the soil being described as a stiff loam, rather chalky, and containing many large flints. An uncultivated belt across the centre was covered with persicaria, thistles, and nettles. From the Croxton portion of the mere a swede was pulled weighing 23 lb. and a cabbage 15 lb., while 40 tons of beet per acre was taken from the Wretham portion. In mid-November the bed of Fowlmere was as dry as any upland field, and where rabbits had burrowed deeply the soil brought up was quite dry and sandy. The next year it was again planted with beet and mangolds, but the water rose suddenly in October, and the men who pulled the roots had in some parts to stand knee-deep in water.

When Henry Stevenson, F.L.S., visited this mere in 1869 he wrote: "Charming as is the aspect of this wide expanse of water, with its green islets and thick belt of rushes at the further end—there is an absence of that utter wildness of character which marks the other two" [Ringmere and Langmere]. When the mere was very high in 1884, some of the adjoining fields were flooded, and there were two smaller meres on the eastern side.

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So high was the water that a number of waterhens' nests were built in old blackbirds' nests in the hedges. Mr. C. J. Staniland, R.I., visited the mere in 1887, and writing in the *Graphic*, said :

"Fowlmere repaid us for all our exertions. Imagine a solitary pool surrounded by firs at one end and open country at the other, swarming with peewit, teal, duck, and seagulls, set in the midst of a lonely heath."

When the waters of the mere were very low in 1921 it was possible to see the adventitious roots formed on the trunks of the alders to a height of 4 feet at the southern end of the mere. The trees were planted when the water was low, but it gradually rose and for several years the water was several feet up their trunks. Many of them died and others tried to meet the changed conditions by sending out roots from their trunks.

Both the Punch Bowl and Langmere have been dry when the other meres have been fairly full, and in 1909, when Fowlmere was a fine sheet, the only water in the Punch Bowl was in a small pit which had been dug. A portion of the bed of the mere was then enclosed with wire-netting, and used as a garden by one of the neighbouring cottagers. In October, 1921, it was quite dry, as it was also in 1862, 1901-3, 1905 and 1909.

Ornithologically these meres are remarkable for the number of species of duck which breed there, though not, perhaps, all in one year, as the extent to which these sheets of water are thus favoured is naturally dependent on whether they are full or dry. Mallard, gadwall, tufted duck, pochard, shovellers, teal and garganey nest near the meres, not on the borders, where there is no shelter, but

among the bracken, heather and rushes on the surrounding heathland. The only birds that nest on the meres themselves are great crested grebe, little grebe, coot, and moorhen, which sometimes utilize the shelter of the patches of *Scirpus lacustris* in Ringmere and Fowlmere, but almost as frequently nest in open water, while in 1908 coots' nests were built on the shores of Langmere, 4 or 5 feet from the water. At long intervals a few black-headed gulls resort to Langmere and to the ponds between that mere and Ringmere for nesting purposes. Canadian geese also breed here regularly, and in April, 1906, I flushed a pair of ruddy shelduck at Langmere. Wigeon are common winter visitors and golden-eye, pintail, smews, and ospreys have also been noted.

In the stillness of the summer night it is possible to distinguish some of the species of ducks on the meres solely by their notes. There is the low, contented quacking of the mallard and gadwall; the "knack" of the garganey; the soft whistle of the pochard; the "currugh-currugh" of the tufted duck flying from one part of the mere to another; the clear, ringing, oft-repeated "koo" of the coot; and the "whit-whit" of the little grebe; with the shrill call of the stone-curlews from the surrounding heathland, or the "churr" of a nightjar on some gnarled pine.

From the shelter of the pines, hawthorns, and alders on the east bank of Fowlmere, one may watch the caution exhibited by the herons as they fish in the shallows, and the stone-curlews, lapwings, redshank, ringed plovers, partridges, pheasants, wood-pigeons, jays, and crows that fly down to drink at the water's edge. In spring and autumn redshank, ringed plover, and sandpipers run

rapidly along the shores, or utter their mellow whistle as they take short flights from point to point; black-headed gulls from Scoulton pay brief visits; or hundreds of lapwings wheel over the water, their white breasts resplendent in the sunshine, and then as they turn and show their darker backs, almost lost to view against the background of pines. It is obvious from the nests and eggs that there is a number of moorhens on the mere, but they are rarely seen, preferring to hide in the shelter of the reeds rather than swim in open water, as the coots commonly do. Coots are almost always visible, sometimes to the number of 200 in one flock. Little grebe are also regular residents, and I have on several occasions seen twenty at one time. Nests are to be found every year, usually near the edge of the mere, but sometimes in 3 feet of water. On one occasion I saw two pairs of eared grebe on Fowlmere. Their diving was the prettiest I have seen. They raised themselves on their feet on the surface of the water and then jumped up and took a real "header" just in the same spot, hardly making a ripple. They did not travel long distances under water, but came up almost in the same place that they went down. During the winter of 1904-5 there were twenty-one swans on Fowlmere, and fifteen in June, 1908, while smaller numbers have been seen on many other occasions. The gadwall is a very common duck on the meres. On one occasion a single bird on Fowlmere was followed by no less than twenty-two ducklings, probably two or three broods intermixed. In the year 1850 the late Rev. John Fountaine received a pair of these birds—then only regarded as somewhat rare migrants—taken at Wolferton Decoy. These he pinioned and turned off on Narford

Lake, where they quickly increased, and those in South-west Norfolk are believed to be the descendants of this pair. I counted over eighty tufted duck on Fowlmere on March 22, 1908, and most of the species recorded for the other meres have also been seen here from time to time. Fifteen golden-eye were seen on the mere in 1911, and wigeon and pintail occur almost every winter. The goosander has been shot, and four grey phalarope were seen on a pond near by in 1846.

Langmere is the most beloved by wildfowl of all the heath meres, and this despite the fact that its margins are devoid of any vegetation which could shelter a bird or a nest.

On a day in August when the temperature was little below ninety degrees in the shade, four of us sat on the knoll which then bordered the mere on the south, though when the mere is full it is an island. The Scotch pines yielded welcome shade, but the breeze that blew fitfully seemed as though it had come from an oven. Away to the eastward great columns of smoke arose from Roudham Heath where heather, bracken, and turf were all ablaze over a huge area. We sat quietly and watched the birds which came from a wide district to slake their thirst at this heathland pool. A pair of gadwall, three teal, and a swan were on its surface. Around the margin were a few redshank, a number of ringed plovers, and several flocks of lapwings, which appeared to have gathered there from the uplands where they had nested. They flew round and round in flocks of about fifty, and when they passed over the sandy shore of the mere, the shadows caused by the brilliant sunlight appeared to double their numbers. Even more interesting were the birds

that came down to the opposite shore to drink. There were four green woodpeckers, two old birds and two young—a little family party—thrushes, starlings, moorhens, turtle doves, wood pigeons, and stock doves. A pair of turtle doves flew backwards and forwards to one of the Scotch pines where they probably had a late brood. From the distant heath came the plaint of a young stone-curlew; ringed plovers and redshank whistled as they changed quarters; and for a few minutes there was a chorus of stone-curlews from far and near—deep answering unto deep. The dried up portions of the bed of the mere were in places covered with a dense growth of amphibious persicaria, and at the western end of the long pool a carpet of its roseate blossoms covered the surface of the water. Dwarfed golden dock and silver weed maintained a precarious existence in the sandy beds of the old pools.

To lie in June beneath the shade of gnarled Scotch pines overlooking such a heathland pool as Langmere and to feel the invigorating breeze blowing from miles of sand country with heather, bracken, and pines, to have no sign of civilization in sight except like-minded companions, is bliss indeed. Though probably without our aesthetic enjoyment of its beauties, prehistoric man loved the spot, and strewn all around are thousands of his potboilers and numerous flakes, while on a little plateau across the pool, on the sand at the mouth of almost every rabbit's burrow, there are Roman potsherds of various pastes and patterns. The bird-life of such a pool is of amazing interest. The ducks are shovellers, gadwall, tufted duck and pochard, mostly in pairs, and all nesting in the vicinity. In the bright sunlight, under a sky of cloudless blue the beauty of their plumage shows to perfection.

The shovellers especially are gorgeous. They are easily picked out when they fly by the fact that the bill droops down at an angle with the head. Gadwall fly at a great pace with necks outstretched and somewhat snaky, while pochard and tufted duck are slower in flight and present a different outline. When the plumage can be distinguished there is no possibility of mistaking the identity of the various species. Of the five Canada geese on the pool two have a brood of cowslip-coloured goslings. They swim up and down with a parent on each flank, and no human father and mother could be more careful of their children. Around the margin of the pool redshank and ringed plover maintain a restless flitting to and fro and whistling lapwings wheel and dip and cry; wheatears take short flights from molehill to molehill; the gaudy plumaged yellow wagtail flashes past; and a pair of silent cuckoos cross the water. Stockdoves came sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs from distant heaths, winging their way straight to the margin of the pool, where they drank their fill and immediately flew off straight to where eggs or young were awaiting their attention in some deserted rabbit-burrow. A redshank waded breastdeep in the water searching for food; a lapwing had a real bath, sending up showers of spray; and a solitary stone-curlew flew from the open heathland to shelter in a tangle of bracken. A well-grown young lapwing ran away on the heath, and suddenly squatted on the other side of a tuft I was approaching. There was a hollow on the near side, but he scorned that, and but for the fact that I watched him carefully and knew where his progress ceased, I should never have found him. With three others, which were on the bare mud with dead

vegetation on the edge of the pool we were not so fortunate. Three of us marked them, approached slowly, had them in full view until we were only a few yards distant, and then suddenly lost them. They appeared to have been spirited away, and a detailed scrutiny of the ground failed to reveal them. We retired and watched, and after some minutes they reappeared near the spot we had searched. On this occasion we each marked one, and would not be diverted from the quest, with the result that we found them all, squatting and marvellously protected by their colouring, including the light band of down around the neck.

There are six artificial lakes in the Norfolk part of Breckland. That in Cockley Cley Park is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres in extent and is frequented by mallard, gadwall and tufted duck. Diddlington Lake is about 60 acres in area. Pintail, golden-eye, pochard, teal, mallard, tufted duck, garganey, shovellers and wigeon are regularly seen, and ospreys, goosanders, mergansers and bitterns are occasional visitors. It is well stocked with coarse fish. Shadwell Lake is about 3 acres in extent. Eight species of duck have been recorded; a young bittern was killed by a warrener's dog in the reeds in 1903; a peregrine has been seen chasing the ducks. The fish are pike, roach, rudd, tench, lake bream and white bream. Pike have been caught up to 23 lb. in weight. Stanford Water was made about 1847, and is approximately 40 acres in extent. There was an earlier Stanford Mere where shovellers nested in 1826, and pochard and black-headed gulls in 1836. Other nesting birds are mallard, tufted duck, gadwall, teal and great crested grebe. Wonderful "bags" made here have included scaup, smew, goosander, pintail, wigeon, golden-

eye, wild geese and shovellers. Pike have been taken up to 19 lb. in weight, and other fish are perch, tench, rudd and eels. Thompson Water was also constructed about 1847 and is 40 acres in extent. The nesting birds include seven species of duck. A great northern diver was shot in 1875 and pintail have been noted. A pike of 29½ lb. has been caught; and on February 3, 1905, one angler caught 92 lb. of pike, the largest fish being 24½ lb. The late Lord Walsingham has caught over 100 perch in a day; bream disappeared many years ago; golden tench were introduced; and tench, rudd and eels also occur. Although not subject to fluctuations from the same causes as the meres, Thompson Water became practically dry during the drought of 1921. Both this and Stanford Water are on the course of a small tributary of the Wissey, but Stanford Water is also fed by springs. West Tofts Mere was constructed by throwing a big clay dam across a valley, about half a mile from the source of a tributary of the Wissey, which rises in powerful chalk springs near Mouse Hall, forming a sheet of water about 4 acres in extent. In addition to some fine beech trees growing on the dam, there is on the southern end a poplar with a girth of 17½ feet 5 feet from the ground. The secluded waters of the mere are beloved by wild fowl, which include the species found on the other meres, and red-throated divers have also been noted.



THE LITTLE OUSE, SANTON DOWNHAM



THE LITTLE OUSE, THIRD STAUNCH

CHAPTER VII

In the Little Ouse Valley

FOR natural beauty it is probable that the valleys of the Upper Wensum and Glaven have more attractions than those of other Norfolk rivers, but for variety the Little Ouse between its source at Lopham and its junction with the Great Ouse at Brandon Creek is easily first. It enters the eastern side of the breck area at Garboldisham, from which to Brandon it is bordered by a narrow strip of alluvium. Below Euston Bridge an unnamed Suffolk tributary flows in from Hepworth, and a much smaller one almost on the boundary of Barnham and Thetford. This rises at Honhill Spring, almost on the Elveden boundary, but is mainly fed by five powerful springs which rise in a small pool near the Biblesmoor Plantation. The bed of the pool is muddy, with the exception of the immediate vicinity of the springs, which are surrounded by the finest silvery sand, which always appears to be boiling. Local tradition asserts that the springs are constant. In Thetford the Little Ouse flows beneath St. Audrey's Mill, described at the Domesday Survey as Bishop's Mill, and now the only mill on its course, and in a further half mile is joined by the Thet, the volume

of which is not greatly less than that of the main stream.

Between the single iron span of the "Town Bridge" at Thetford, and the four stone arches of Brandon Bridge, lie nearly 9 miles of the Little Ouse, which, though lacking the easy navigability of the Broadland streams, and also some of their characteristic charms, has a peculiar wildness, and no other riverside walk in Norfolk has interests to equal those of the towing-path or "haling-path," which connects the two towns. At Thetford it makes an abortive start on the Suffolk side of the river, but the proper way of approach for the main walk is on the Norfolk side of the stream by Minstergate Street.

An Act for making the river navigable was passed in 1669, but the Corporation of Thetford at first declined to carry it into effect, and the work was ultimately undertaken by the Earl of Arlington, of Euston Hall, who received a toll of 6*d.* per ton, last, or chaldron, on the merchandise passing up and down stream. His rights descended to his daughter and heiress Isabel, first Duchess of Grafton, who granted them to the town of Thetford, the Corporation of which still has jurisdiction over the navigation from Thetford to Wilton Bridge, a distance of 13 miles. Navigation on this swiftly flowing stream is rendered possible by staunches, which serve the same purpose as locks. Of these there are but 32 in England, of which 26 are in the fenland area, and 7 of these are on the Little Ouse. Down stream from Thetford the staunches are the 1st or Thetford; 2nd or Thetford Middle; 3rd or Turfpool; 4th or Croxton; 5th or Santon; 6th or Brandon; 7th or

Sheepwash—all belonging to the Thetford Navigation. These staunches have an oaken door to hold up the water. This is raised by chains working on an axle, at one end of which is a large wheel, on which the operator treads the spokes, and so by turning the wheel winds up the chain and raises the door, which is held fast by a hook in the spokes of the wheel. Next the staunch door are one or two sluices or “cloughs” as they are locally termed, which help to regulate the height of the water, and beyond these is an overfall. In the river below each staunch is a deep pool or “staunch hole,” usually a favourite place for fishing and bathing.

In the palmy days of the navigation when the annual income of the Thetford Corporation was £1,054, of which £955 came from navigation tolls, there was a regular service to Lynn, by various “gangs” of lighters known by the names of their owners. The typical fen lighter was about 42 feet long, by about 9 feet wide at bottom and 10 feet at deck, and drew when empty about 12 inches, and when loaded with 25 tons about 3 feet 6 inches. Lighters on the Little Ouse, however, could not take such loads; the draught from the Great Ouse to the Two-Mile Bottom was only about 3 feet, and from the latter place to Thetford 2 feet. These lighters generally navigated in “gangs” of about five, the stempost of one being tightly coupled to the stempost of the next—the boats being reversible—by a “seizing chain.” All the lighters except the first of the “gang” were fitted with poles projecting from the bows like bowsprits, the second having a longer one known as a “steering-pole” by which a man standing on the first navigated the “gang.” Two ropes called “fest ropes,”

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one from each side of the lighter, passed round the fore end of the steering pole, were used to steady the lighter when required. The shorter poles on the other lighters were called "jambing-poles," and were attached to the sides by ropes called "quarter bits." As a rule one lighter in each gang was provided with a cabin, and was called the "house lighter." These gangs were drawn by horses which walked along the haling path, and forded or swam the river when the path crossed from one side to the other. For a long time water carriage competed successfully with the railways, though of late years there has been no navigation on the Little Ouse and the spectacle of a gang of lighters being hauled by sturdy horses may be considered but a memory.

Below the town of Thetford with practically no break until Brandon is reached, the marshland of the Little Ouse is bordered by heathland. On the Norfolk bank, reaching from the 1st to the 3rd staunch is Thetford Abbey Heath, consisting of bracken, gorse, and heath pasture with a big area of sand-sedge at the northern end. The continuation of this gravel ridge is the Two-mile-bottom Common of 29 acres "common to Thetford St. Peter." In the boundary plantation, running in a north-easterly direction, is an earthen bank known as the "Mayor's Balk," an ancient boundary of the common fields. The common extends for half a mile, and at the further end the gravel terraces border the stream, at their foot being a perennial chalk spring rising in an old copper.

The Suffolk bank below consists of Thetford Warren, the former home of the great bustard and the silver-grey rabbit. A large area was planted with trees from Scottish nurseries between 1877 and 1889. With few

exceptions, these trees were all cut down during the war by German prisoners who had a camp on the northern side of the Warren. The area now more nearly resembles the illustration in Stevenson's *Birds of Norfolk* than at any time during the past forty-five years.

The haling path or "hauling way" as it was termed in 1751, is chiefly of chalk, varying in width, but only a few yards at the widest part, and between the river and the water meadows. Near Thetford these meadows are broad, and they alternately narrow and widen downstream. The sandbanks or "hards" in the stream have greatly increased in size since dredging ceased. Those who remember the river thirty or forty years ago can point out many places where it has encroached on the land on one side, and then gradually silted up on the other. A little way below the second staunch, the first piece of marshland on the right bank of the stream is Broadwater Common, which was probably a "broad water" reclaimed by making the haling path when the navigation was established in the seventeenth century. Its $6\frac{1}{2}$ acres are now "common pasture of Thetford St. Peter," but it is customary for anyone who can to secure the hay, which is removed to Thetford by boat. This is now all that remains of the common meadows which at one time extended for many miles alongside the stream. In the ditch which bounds Broadwater Common on the north are several big clumps of panicked sedge (*Carex paniculata*), the curious matted tufts of which were formerly used for hassocks, and were locally called "pesses." A few which were used in the Church of All Saints, Icklingham, are still preserved there.

One of the Thetford regulations about 1570 was that

“upon the common days to be had in the common fen, no person shall enter into the common fen, but upon the accustomed days, for fodder or reed, and that none shall upon the same days enter into the same fen before the bell be rang for that purpose.” Beyond this common is Turfpit Common, which was awarded to Lord Petre by the Inclosure Act of 1806. The neighbouring staunch was formerly known as the Turfpool Staunch, and traces of the cuttings for peat may still be seen on the meadows. Turbaries were given to the Thetford Canons of the Holy Sepulchre in the twelfth century by Earl Warrenne, and in 1567 Sir Richard Fulmerston’s property in the town included “Le Fennes.”

From Thetford to the third staunch the “haling path” is on the Norfolk side of the stream, but just below the staunch it crosses to the Suffolk side, and pedestrians utilize the staunch by climbing the ladder to the level of the wheel-axle, walking across on two planks, and down a ladder on the other side to a brick pier, across the “cloughs” and by a plank over the overfall. The “haling path” is bordered by a ditch beyond which is a portion of Thetford Warren on which heather grows to a height of 3 feet. Grass grows across the narrow path, and each bank of the river is clothed with rank vegetation, from which a constant succession of affrighted waterhens dashes out, or a noisy pair of gadwall fly up and circle round before seeking securer quarters. Herons, coot and snipe are also frequently met with; kestrels hover over the low-lying portion of the adjacent warren; a kingfisher sits motionless on a hawthorn spray, first its ruddy breast and then its blue-green back glinting in the sunshine; or by the narrow dyke running parallel

with the river a water-vole may be seen sitting on its hind-legs to reach a reed-stem which it subsequently bites through. Thistles 6 feet high, with prickles like serried ranks of needles, viciously attack the traveller's legs; nettles of gigantic height try every art to sting his face; hordes of insects with irritating hum and painful sting resent the intrusion into their fastnesses; and alder branches provide more substantial obstacles to his progress. But there are many compensations. In summer there is the beauty of the riverside flowers, the lines of brilliant-blossomed willow-herbs, gorgeous clustered spikes of the purple loosestrife, more modest purple flowers of the skullcap, creamy waves of scented meadow-sweet and meadow-rue, tall umbels of the hemlock with its mousy smell, yellow stars of the fleabane and bur-marigold, lilac-tinged blossoms of the valerian, beloved of cats, and the solid flesh-coloured blooms of the hemp agrimony. It is a scene of Oriental splendour, of wondrous beauty of colouring, an almost unknown valley which is a floral treasure-house.

The wealth of flowers by the waterside attracts swarms of insects from July to September. On one plant of agrimony I have seen six peacock butterflies sunning themselves; red admirals and small tortoiseshells are abundant; while lovely demoiselle dragonflies hover over the sedge. Moorhens and little grebe are common on the river, coot less so, and snipe and redshank nest on the neighbouring marshes. Mallard and gadwall are sometimes very plentiful, and tufted duck, teal, pochard, golden-eye, wigeon, and scaup duck also occur. Stone-curlews, ringed plovers, and stock doves nest on the heath bordering the marshes, but the great bustard, which

was at one time the glory of Thetford Warren, has long been extinct. Where the warren gives place to the marsh are the "Mayor's Holms" or river-islands. In 1577 the Mayor of Thetford had £20 salary, and the "Fishing of the Home," while in 1586 the produce was ordered to be applied to the repair of the "Gylde Hall."

At the fourth staunch the river ran to the northward until 1827, and its diversion made an island of about an acre, now covered with salallows, among the stumps of which many sedge-warblers nest. 'Near this spot in the sixteenth century was a pool known as St. Edmund's Pond, and probably at one time a bridge, for in 1290 the fisheries of Thetford extended from the town to "St. Edmund's Bridge towards Santon." In the river below the staunch grow the floating bur-reed, water-milfoil, ivy-leaved pond-weed, and the beautiful flowers of the arrowhead and flowering-rush. For some distance the haling path is rather badly defined, and borders the wide expanses of Santon Downham heath. On the Norfolk side a huge chalkpit will be noticed beyond the railway. On its western scarp, some uneven mounds covered with sand-sedge hide the foundations of the Saxon church of St. Helen, described as St. Helen's Chappell in 1574. It stood on the cliff-like verge of the heath 40 feet above the river that softly flows through the green meads. Not 20 yards away was a spring which appears to have been called St. Helen's Well, though in the eighteenth century known as Tenant's Well, later as Tenant Well, and now as Tanner's Well, possibly one of those holy wells resorted to by pilgrims in early times, or it may merely have been a spring of water from the chalk named from its nearness to the

church. Centuries ago the old well was destroyed. The sedge of the heathland was found to yield excellent chalk, a cutting was made from the river, and thousands of tons have been carried away by lighters to improve the roads in the fens, and the white clean-cut chalk wall of the early quarry has been toned by time. This L-shaped inlet under the railway has water strongly impregnated with chalky matter, and being unruffled by the breezes has a wonderful translucency. Even the leaves of the weeds in it are encrusted with a white sediment. Here I have camped out, sleeping in a small rowing-boat.

Bed in the bush with stars to see
 Bread I dip in the river,
 There's the life for a man like me
 There's the life for ever.

In the night watches there was the splash of a fish in the creek, for sluggish bream haunt the still waters, and from the sedge-lined river marge the harsh call of a coot, moorhen or wild duck. From the higher ground came the plaint of a lapwing, or the shrill call of a stone-curlew, while there was always the drip of water from the arch to the creek, and the moaning of the wind through that gigantic Æolian harp, the "Half-moon Plantation," so called from its shape. In the reed-bed the wind kept up an incessant whispering, whilst the sedge rasped and grated in chorus, and in the hulls came the patter of the raindrops on the leaves overhead, or the thud of the drippings from the pollard willows.

The pit is a floral paradise, facing south with an abundant water-supply, and chalky soil. In autumn when the water-mint, purple loosestrife and willow-herbs

are in bloom, thousands of butterflies come to the feast. In one pool about 6 feet in diameter, I have seen at one time three peacock butterflies, four red admirals, and several blue heaths, poised on the rounded heads of the mint and sunning themselves, or sipping the nectar. From the top of the pit the boundary bank of the borough of Thetford which runs across the heathland to a tumulus known as "Blood Hill" was in the sixteenth century called the "Haye Meer," probably from the Norman-French "haia" a hedge, while the latter word means a boundary.

Opposite St. Helen's Well the haling path skirts the marshland once more and passes a meadow on which the redshank nest yearly, at the back of Little Lodge Farm. From this standpoint the tiny church at Santon with its ivy-covered tower, and the quaint thatched farmhouse close by, are seen at their best. Thence the path is overshadowed by tall trees, diversified by hawthorn bushes or clusters of dog-roses. Woodland—dim recesses of thick pine plantations carpeted only with pine-needles—comes up to the verge of the ditch bordering the towing-path, and rabbits, pheasants and partridges feed among the luxuriant herbage. At the fifth staunch the summer months generally show a spotted flycatcher making short flights from the mooring-posts in mid-stream, and here the river has again to be crossed to the Norfolk bank.

At the fifth staunch it is necessary to leave the river for about half a mile and follow the roadway on the Norfolk side, which leads on to Downham Bridge, close by which grow the beautiful water avens. Here the haling path is on the Norfolk bank of the river and so

continues to Brandon. There was anciently a bridge here, for in the seventeenth century Reyce in the *Suffolk Breviary* said "the river Ouse hath these bridges: at Euston, at Thetford, at Downham, and at Brandon." By the river-bank the belt of vegetation consists of a beautifully-diversified flora, including the flowering rush, marsh woundwort, fleabane, the broad leaves of the water-dock, angelica, wild parsnip, and hemp agrimony, with an abundance of white comfrey. Between Downham and Brandon the river is deep and narrow, its tortuous course passing through charming sylvan scenery, alder copses framed with reed-tufts, dense pine plantations, solitary oaks and ashes of giant growth, and oft the overhanging willows. In those days of July, when not a cloud is seen from the time that the sun turns the North Sea into a mass of molten gold to the time that it sets in a blaze of splendour, at a spot where the river turns in a basin made of the tree-clad portion of Bromehill and the woods of Santon Downham, there is sometimes absolutely no motion in the heat-laden air, between the points where the wind blows fitfully from the bracken-covered brecks of Santon bringing with it the fragrance of the bordering pine-belts, to where the river opens out to the arid heaths of Bromehill and marshes rank with vegetation. These are dotted with dangerous pulk-holes where the reed-mace thrives, and there are broad dykes and dense copses of sallow haunted by many sedge-warblers. In the midst of these marshes lies Weeting decoy, a deep pool surrounded by nettles and reeds which form an impenetrable belt 8 feet high and many yards wide. Through this wall of reeds, but hidden from the water, a path is cut for gamekeepers and sportsmen, and creep-

ing along this it is possible to come upon thirty or forty gadwall preening their feathers, and contentedly quacking in some tiny creek crossed by a wooden plank.

A short distance above Brandon Bridge the haling path ends at a dyke, and the horses which tow the lighters enter the water, but as this is inconvenient for the pedestrian it is necessary to call for a ferryman from the opposite bank.

The bridge at Brandon is one of the most picturesque in East Anglia. The prehistoric ford was followed by a ferry which in early times gave its name to the town, but there was certainly a bridge there in the fifteenth century, for in 1487 an indulgence was granted to the Bishop of Ely for the repair of the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Etheldreda on the bridge at Brandon Ferry. This would appear to have been a stone structure, but there was a wooden bridge here in the sixteenth century, repaired in 1615, and again in 1640, on the latter occasion at a cost of £40. When the privilege of collecting tolls at this bridge was granted to Sir Richard Fulmerston in 1550 by Edward VI, acting on the advice of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster, it was described as "the toll of the bridge in Brandon Ferry." This right was leased for thirty years at a rental of £4 per annum, half to be paid on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary and half on the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel. The lessee was empowered to charge for every cart or carriage with wool, cloth, and all vendible goods passing over the bridge 1*d.*, and for every horse loaded with wool and vendible things $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*, for cattle or saleable beasts at the rate of 4*d.* for twenty, for every saleable horse, mare, or colt $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.*, and for every quarter

of a grain of what kind so ever one flaggon. When Thetford was incorporated by Queen Elizabeth in 1573 she gave to the Mayor, Burgesses, and Commonalty the "toll of the bridge of Brandon Ferry," for which £4 per annum was to be paid, so that the Corporation should "for ever repair, sustain, and amend" the bridge, "when and as often as is necessary." The bridge is a picturesque structure of brick and stone, high-crowned with a narrow roadway, having a rectangular recess on the upstream side, and an angular one on the downside, and is pierced by four arches. It was built on dry land. The river originally ran some yards to the northward, and part of the "Ram" inn is built over the old channel. When the bridge was completed, the river was diverted to its present bed, but its original course long remained the boundary between Norfolk and Suffolk.

Though the Corporation of Thetford has long since ceased to collect tolls at this bridge, it is still responsible for the repair of the structure.

At the present time the Little Ouse, which practically enters the fens at Brandon, ends its course at its confluence—formerly known as Priest Bridge—with the Great Ouse, but until the beginning of the thirteenth century the outfall of the Great Ouse was at Wisbech, and the Little Ouse continued its course to Lynn with the Wissey and Nar as tributaries. At the beginning of the thirteenth century a cut was made between Littleport and Brandon Creek Bridge, and the waters of the Great Ouse were diverted into the Little Ouse, with an outfall at Lynn.

CHAPTER VIII

Three Prehistoric Trackways

IN a county like Norfolk in which two-thirds of the parishes have yielded remains of the Neolithic or Bronze stages of culture it is highly probable that there was a large number of prehistoric trackways, which in the more thickly populated areas are now in use as metalled roads, with all trace of their early origin lost. Only in the more barren districts, where many of the by-roads are little altered since they first came into use as channels of communication for a stone or bronze-using folk, is it possible to assert with any degree of probability that any particular track is prehistoric. Many of those in Breckland probably originated in the Neolithic age or the Bronze age. This may be the case with the Pilgrims' Path, Six Tree Road and Seven Tree Road, Icklingham, Shaker's Road, Wangford, or Fincham Drove, Narborough, but in these cases it is not easy to prove the hypothesis. There are, however, good reasons for believing this to be the case both with a national road, the Icknield Way, with a provincial road, Peddar's Way, and with a local road, the Drove, which unites with Peddar's Way on Roudham Heath, its course of some 14 miles connecting this ancient way with the fenland at Hockwold.



THE ICKNIELD WAY, SHELTERHOUSE CORNER



THE ICKNIELD WAY, MARMAN'S GRAVE

THE ICKNIELD WAY

Though it is now impossible to trace a connected road from end to end, there is little doubt that a series of trackways between Norfolk and Wiltshire have from very early times been known as the Icknield Way, and it is highly probable that originally they provided through communication between the south-west of England and the Norfolk coast. These trackways appear to be prehistoric, to have been utilized but never re-made by the Romans, avoiding the upper levels of the hills and skirting the slopes where the forest presumably ended. The adjacent country is dotted with hill-forts, barrows, and remains of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages.

The tracks from the south-west, generically known as the Icknield Way, pass through Royston, and Newmarket, cross the Kennet at Kentford and enter Breckland at Cavenham, between which and Lackford Bridge the track is over Cavenham Heath. On the south side of the River Lark, adjoining Lackford Bridge, the ancient approach to the ford may still be seen.

Though there is little doubt that the Icknield Way crossed the River Lark at what is now Lackford Bridge, and thence followed the boundary of the Blackbourne and Lackford Hundreds to Thetford, some confusion has been caused by two ancient ways, which crossed the river further westward, one at Temple Bridge, west of Icklingham St. James, and the other a little west of the Pilgrim's Path, which runs north-east from Icklingham All Saints' Church. The former was for a long period part of the London Road between Thetford and Newmarket. It was close by Temple Bridge that during

the Peasants' Rising in 1381, Bishop Henry le Spencer, travelling from Cambridge and Newmarket, met John Litester, the Norfolk leader, with two hostages and three followers on his way to the Court of Richard II. Capgrave says that the Bishop "came to Icklingham at a spot where a mill somewhat narrowed the roadway between Cambridge and Thetford," and Blomefield, in explanation, says that "at that time the great road which now (1739) goes through Barton Mills, went through that town at a place still called Temple Bridge, by which there was then a mill, and houses for reception for all travellers; the passage from the river to the fields was a narrow lane." In Sir T. Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* (1641) the distance from London to Norwich is given as 95 miles, Newmarket to Icklingham sands being 10, on to Thetford 6, and thence to Attleborough 10. Ogilby's road map of England (1644) shows the main road going through Icklingham. It seems probable that the present north-westerly course of this road from Temple Bridge was not the original one, but that it went north-eastward and joined the Icknield Way at Shelterhouse Corner, for Kirby's *Suffolk Traveller* (1764), describing the road from Bury to Brandon at 8 miles 5 furlongs from Bury, gives the right turn as to Thetford (this would be the Icknield Way) and the left to Icklingham, while at 10 miles 2 furlongs the present main road from Newmarket to Thetford is crossed. Unless the Old London Way joined the Icknield Way south of this point it is unaccounted for. Ten tracks formerly met at Shelterhouse Corner, and recent maps of Suffolk mark one of these as coming from Temple Bridge. That the Icknield Way formed the old London road from Thet-

ford seems proved by several references. In a description of the Liberties of the town in the reign of Edward I, one boundary is "ad pontem de Lacford versus Novum mercatum"; in 1585 "the way leading from Thetford to Lackford, called Old London Way," is mentioned; and there is a further reference to "Lackefordeweye, alias Salter's Way." North of the Lark, at Temple Bridge, the Old London Road passed Camp Close, where it forms a hollow way on the heath, thence by London Bottom and a barrow called "Deadman's Grave." Eastward there are six barrows in Icklingham between this road and the Icknield Way. South of the Lark it may have rejoined the Icknield Way at Cavenham, or gone by Tuddenham and Herringswell to Newmarket.

Though quite at the extremity of the Hundred, the ford of the Lark on the Icknield Way gave its name to the Lackford Hundred, and the big earthen bank which borders the Icknield Way between Lackford Bridge and Thetford is still the boundary of the two Hundreds. After passing Leech Moor the Way climbs the valley-slope of the Lark by a splendid stretch of turf known as "The Gallop," and there forms the boundary between Icklingham and West Stow. At right angles to the Way there are several huge earthen banks—some 30 feet wide—said to be "trapping banks for rabbits," but probably, in their original state, banks and ditches thrown up in connection with the Way, the ditches having been filled in by blown sand. Some of the banks which have been trenched appear to have been made solely of blown sand, as no stone of any kind was found in them. From the crown of the ridge above the Lark, the view from north to south covers a distance of 18 miles. Between

Lackford Bridge and the road from Elveden to Wordwell the Way is well defined, banked on each side, and used as a public trackway. For the most part it consists of closely-cropped turf, but here and there bracken and furze and heather endeavour to encroach on it, but with little success. While the general direction of the road is straight, its course is serpentine. The crossing of the Wordwell road is variously known as Shelterhouse (the ancient form) or Sheltereye Corner, or more generally as Old Elveden Gap, probably because the Way here cut through the parochial boundary bank. The Way is here about 40 feet wide, and 173 feet above O.D., dropping to 80 at Marmansgrave, and again reaching 100 feet at the top of the slope to the Little Ouse. Between Shelterhouse Corner and Marmansgrave the Way, which is in the parish of Elveden, is impassable to any but a pedestrian. Hillocks of blown sand covered with sand-sedge have in places obliterated the track, rabbits have burrowed all over the road, vegetation has been allowed to grow unchecked, and straggling branches of the tall hawthorns check the progress of the incautious traveller.

The crossing of the Icknield Way by the road from Barnham to Elveden is known as Marmansgrave. From this point to Thetford the Way is traceable, but not open. From Marmansgrave to the boundary of the borough of Thetford is 1 mile. In the time of Edward I a bank called Londmere formed the boundary between Thetford fields and the fields of Barnham, Elveden, and Santon Downham, and between the Liberty of Thetford and the Liberty of St. Edmund. This bank still forms the southern boundary of the borough of Thetford,

possibly because a thousand years ago King Edward the Confessor ended a charter to Bury Abbey as follows :

“ If anyone shall be so maddened by the incitements of the devil that he determine to alter the boundaries of St. Edmunds’ Liberty, or to nullify it or spoil it in any way, let him be anathematised or drowned in the fire of hell, unless he come to his senses in this life.”

In 29 Elizabeth it was stated that there was a great boundary called Port Mere, which began at Skatchowe in Elveden and extended “ to the late cross which divides the lands of Thetford, Elveden, and Barnham.” The Icknield Way formed the boundary between the parishes of Elveden and Barnham, so that the cross stood where that trackway entered the bounds of Thetford. In 1585 the wooden cross which stood at the junction of the three parishes was known as Barrow Cross. The course of the Way adjoins Thetford Cemetery on the east, and the top of the slope from the river south of this spot was in the eighteenth century known as London Hill. Continuing its north-easterly sweep, the Way crossed the present Bury Road north of the Gasworks and the old Euston Road at “ Chunk Hervey’s Grave,” a short distance from the ancient fords. “ Weaver’s Close,” which adjoins the grave, was marked by Thomas Martin in a MS. plan of Thetford in 1740 as “ The Camp.” The Way first crossed the Little Ouse at the Nun’s Bridge, anciently “ Incelland Bridge,” where scolds were ducked in the ducking-stool, which was described in 1392 as “ by Nun’s Bridge in Bailey End,” over a narrow tongue of the Guiltcross Hundred in Norfolk—the Little Ouse being the county boundary—and thence over the Thet at a spot marked as “ Old Ford ” in Burrell’s Map of

Thetford, 1807. Its pre-eminence in Saxon times is indicated by the name of the town, which is simply *Thæt-ford*, *thæt* being the neuter form of "the."

North of the fords it is possible that even in early times the Icknield Way forked, one branch going to the north-east and the other to the north-west, the latter being the more important route, at any rate until the end of the Roman period. The north-eastern branch crossed what was the Market Place until the removal of the market in 1786, the ancient inns denoting its former importance. Here stood the market cross, and in 1408 the Austin Friars had permission to build a hermitage at the west end of the church adjoining the street, where they received alms. The Friary was in 1509 described as "in ye market stede in Thetford." Thence the Way passed through the Castle Hill earthworks, the largest in East Anglia, and by Gallow's Pit, where Martin in his MS. plan of 1740 has drawn a gibbet. This would be in accordance with early usage, as criminals were usually gibbeted by the most frequented public roads. The Way continued by Green Lane, which in the Thetford inclosure award of 1806 is described as "Kilverstone Road." The superior Leet of Kilverstone was held by the Lord of the Hundred of Shropham at the stone cross, and there also the Leet of the Hundred was sometimes held. The Way entered the parish of Kilverstone close by the present railway crossing on the branch line from Thetford to Bury St. Edmunds and for a mile onwards is even now a typical prehistoric trackway, sandy, with deeply rutted turf, first bordered by low fir hedges and ancient elders, and then by a fine avenue of trees. The continuation of Green Lane appears to have been closed when

"Maiden's Walk" was made, but even now plough-men can distinguish its further course by the greater hardness of the soil. In one of the fields between Green Lane and Roudham Heath, five hawthorns seem to indicate the ancient track, which is continued by three in the next. On Brettenham and Bridgham heaths there are still traces of a traditional "wagon road," probably part of the Icknield Way between the ford at Thetford and the ford at Larlingford, though it may be assumed that this portion of its course was little used after the beginning of the seventeenth century. Evidence as to its continuation is lacking.

For the north-westerly track, which continues on the chalk ridge, as does the Way from Wiltshire to Thetford, two routes are possible through the town. Both these would connect with an old road which left the present Mundford Road just beyond the New Road and drift, and went almost due north until it reached the Thetford boundary, where it would be joined by the Way from Kilverstone, which in a plan of Cocksedges' lands in Thetford, in 1734 (Corporation Documents) was described as "Weeten Way." The road then continued northward along the Thetford boundary until the boundary turned half a mile beyond Croxton Park. In an account of the bounds of Thetford, in 1574, from Gallows Heath the boundary northwards is defined as "right on till you come to Croxton Fields and from thence down to Little Northwick, and go in Northwick Way until you be past Great Northwick, then on 4 furlongs to a cross or dole mark, and so by dole marks towards Tofts Way." Great Northwick was Croxton Park, and Northwick Way would be the route from Thetford. Another sixteenth-century

account of the bounds of Thetford, coming from the west, describes "certain ground called the Haye Meer, leaving Santon on the west part, and from thence unto a way called the Boundway next Croxton on the north part, and from thence by Thevestye-way unto Kilverstone." The Boundway and Northwick Way are apparently names for the same track. Northwick Way, leading to Croxton Park from the road between Two-mile-bottom and Croxton, is a well-defined track with a Scotch pine hedge and bank on the west. Just before reaching the house at Croxton Park the road is bounded on the east by a wide earthen bank, and is open on the west where a glacial boulder appears to mark the boundary. From boulder to bank is 8 yards. North of Croxton Park it runs east of a line of plantations, and is slightly raised above the level of the adjoining fields.

Major Corby's Ordnance Map of 1824 shows a road by Croxton Park, West Tofts Plantation, and Mouse Hall to Stanford. Where this road was cut by the Drove is marked as "The Gap," in the Croxton Inclosure Award Map. For half a mile across Park Heath, from Heath Coverts to West Tofts Belt (marked 1797), none of the existing tracks among the heather and sand-sedge appears to follow the line of the old road. It can, however, again be picked up east of the West Tofts Belt, where it is a hollow way 8 yards wide with an earthen bank on the west and a high double bank on the east. It continues along the eastern side of the plantation, and south of the road from West Tofts to West Wretham has three earthen banks covered with sand-sedge on the west, and an earthen bank with a high hawthorn hedge on the east, and is here 12 yards wide. It passes the

farm-house known as Mouse Hall, north of which it is a green trackway with earthen banks and a few Scotch pines on the west, and oaks on the east. West of Bagmore Farm there is a big earthen bank on each side, and then the track descends into a valley across a swamp, with alders, and subsequently reeds, on each side. Here it is a well constructed but narrow causeway 4 yards wide. It crosses a deep modern dyke by a brick bridge, is bordered on the east by a line of trees, and on the west by an earthen bank which is well marked until the road from Thetford to Stanford is approached. A plan of the road from Thetford to Stanford in 1786 by James Parker (Thetford Corporation Documents) shows a road at Stanford diverging north-westwards near the "Cock," over Sandy Hill, and crossing the Wissey a short distance west of the present bridge. It is still well-defined. South of the plantation two elms on an earthen bank mark the west side of the old road, and as it descends to the ford it is a hollow way with a natural bank 10 feet high on the east, and then nearer the narrow strip of marsh a high artificial bank on the same side, while on the west another bank borders the road and plantation.

North-west of the ancient ford, the Way runs along the north-eastern side of the Warren Strip, and is for a short distance part of the boundary of the Hundreds of Grimshoe and South Greenhoe. North of the ford there is a solitary tree on the eastern bank of the old road, which as it climbs the ridge develops into a broad raised trackway. James Parker showed this road in 1786, joined on Bodney Warren by a road from Buckenham House, and the two combined went by Smugglers' Road to Swaffham. A 1790 plan by Parker (Thetford Corpora-

tion Documents) shows the old road from Stanford straight to the Blackwater ford at the north end of Bodney. Across Bodney Warren the road has a high earthen bank with gorse on the north-east, and passes near the barrow known as "Man Hill," which was opened in 1901, and found to contain a bronze age cremation. A junction is soon effected with the "Smugglers' Road," which appears to be a comparatively modern way, roughly following the more winding track of the older road. Over most of the plateau it is slightly above the level of the fields and forms a ridgeway. Near the Red Buildings the old track may be indicated by two ancient thorns and a solitary thorn on mounds surrounded by arable land. North of the Red Buildings the Way is raised for some distance, and then descends to the Blackwater ford of the Wissey, obviously at one period one of the most frequented fords in the county. For a short distance it is bordered by ancient hedges, and then as it crosses a narrow belt of heathland on the slope to the fold, it becomes a hollow way, 8 yards wide, worn by the traffic of many centuries, and bordered on the west by pollarded oaks, one of which has a girth of 19 feet at 5 feet from the ground. The stream at the ford is now about 20 feet wide and a foot deep, and is crossed by a two-plank bridge with a handrail. The camping-ground connected with the Bodney ford was obviously on the heathland slope to the south-west, bordering the belt of alluvium about 100 yards wide and protected on three sides by the river.

A ridge of high land comes close to the ford on the north, and the road turns sharply to the north-west in order to surmount the hill at the easiest angle. For

half a mile the existing road is known as Home Lane, Great Cressingham. It then crosses another branch of the Wissey by a ford and enters Hilborough. In 1790, however, James Parker showed (Thetford Corporation Documents) between the two fords a cross road north of the Blackwater, crossing the stream into Hilborough in a direct line with the road to Cockley Cley, and this seems the probable route of the old road. Close by the road to Cockley Cley, in Hilborough, are the remains of St. Margaret's Chapel. The road to Cockley Cley is a hard road as far as Grange Farm, but beyond this it degenerates into a green trackway, banked and narrow and partly covered with bracken. The road again becomes metalled before reaching Cockley Cley, where it crosses a small tributary of the Wissey by a bridge with the old ford on the west. It then turns slightly westward, passes eastward of the church, and climbs the hill on the way to Shingham. From the Shingham road the way quickly diverges northward, and is here a raised way 5 feet in height and 12 yards wide, covered with a Scotch pine plantation. It follows a long line of pine belts until these diverge eastward, when it is continued as a hollow way across the heathland with stunted bracken on the route, and an ancient thorn on the western bank. It passes through the north-east corner of Cockley Cley Wood, where it is a well-defined road 6 yards wide, with slight banks and ditches and devoid of vegetation. Beyond the wood to the road from Beechamwell to Swaffham, it is a wide raised grassy track, with arable land on each side. From the top of the ridge at a height of 142 feet, Swaffham Church is visible on the east and Oxburgh Church on the south-west. North of the road

the track is a hollow way, banked each side, and after passing over wide open fields, it goes east of some farm buildings, is again bordered by plantations first on the west, and then on the east, with other farm buildings on the east. The Way then passes over a small heath and by a breck with a wide boundary bank on the west, on top of which are scattered hawthorns as far as the "Cowell Stone."

This Beechamwell portion is especially interesting. The Rev. J. F. Williams informs me that in Harleian Roll A10 in the British Museum, of the time of Henry IV, this road was mentioned three times, and was described as "Le Pedderysty alias dicta Saltersty." "Pedderysty" is the equivalent of Peddar's Way and "Saltersty" of Salter's Way. The Icknield Way between Thetford and Lackford was also known as "Lackford Way alias Saltersway." In 1842 this part of Beechamwell Warren was marked on an estate map as "Peddar's Road Round." Half a mile of the course of the Way at the north end of Beechamwell is especially interesting, for it is the boundary of the Hundreds of Clackclose and South Greenhoe, of Swaffham on the east, and Beechamwell, Marham, and Narborough on the west, evidence of its antiquity and its importance. Swaffham is $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the east, Martham village $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the west, Beechamwell $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south, and Narborough $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north. Quite close here, in the angle of Swaffham parish, north-west of Narford Wood, which is still called "Narford Gate" (there was a "Narford Gate Round" in 1842), there was in the Henry IV rental previously mentioned, land "super Leystrethill" abutting "super Naughforthgate."

The road from Swaffham to Downham Market cuts through the important half-mile mentioned, and a little way north of this, on the western bank of the Way, lies a boulder known as the "Cowell Stone," which is a Hundred boundary and also the meeting-place of the boundaries of Narborough, Marham, and Swaffham, and, according to a Beechamwell estate map of 1766, was then also the boundary of Beechamwell. The Cowell Stone is at the south-east corner of the Long Plantation, and is a glacial boulder with 10 inches showing above ground, an east and west axis of 3 feet 4 inches, and north and south of 2 feet 11 inches. Just north of the Cowell Stone, at the east end of the Long Plantation, the Fincham Drove diverges eastward and runs in a straight line for over 3 miles towards Southacre. This is also an ancient way which east of the track is a well-defined, fairly deep hollow way, and on the west passes through the Long Plantation, where it is bordered on the south by a dry chalk dyke.

North of the Cowell Stone the Way is well-marked, with an earthen bank on the east and old thorns on the west. It crosses the Swaffham to Lynn railway by a bridge, and then west of a plantation and east of a hedge and bank to the road from Swaffham to Lynn. East of the road it passes through Low Road Belt, and is a narrow, raised way. On emerging from the wood, the old road from Swaffham to Lynn, now a wide, green trackway, is crossed. In Narford the route is a wide grass track across open country, raised at first, and then with a wide earthen bank on the west. This bank is continued through a wood south of the obelisk, and is then apparently lost. Faden in 1797 showed its continuation through

Narford Hall grounds. Major Colby in 1824 showed it passing by the obelisk west of Narford Hall and over the Nar by a ford where the lake now is, a ford mentioned by the late Mr. E. M. Beloe in his paper on the "Great Fen Road." At the present time the section of the Way, from Thetford to Narford, consists of $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles of metalled road, $13\frac{1}{4}$ miles of green road, and a doubtful $5\frac{1}{4}$ miles, which is, however, for the most part well-defined in ancient maps.

From Narford the old road runs by Gaytonthorpe east of Grimston, Hillington, Flitcham, Shernbourne, and Sedgeford to the coast at Hunstanton. In this section there is $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles of green trackway.

PEDDAR'S WAY

Peddar's Way is another prehistoric track adapted and improved by the Romans. It crosses Norfolk in a south-easterly direction from the coast-line at Holme to Blackwater, a ford on the Little Ouse some four miles east of Thetford, and thence into Suffolk. Although its continuity is now somewhat broken, in its original condition it was the longest and straightest local road, and the one that most avoided human habitation. For the greater part of its course it is unmade, grass-grown and bounded by one or two earthen banks. No part seems absolutely straight; it winds more or less according to the nature of the country. For most of its course it still marks parish boundaries. Castleacre is the only village of any importance on the Way. Dr. Jessopp says that after leaving the Nar at Castleacre the Way "travels into regions of desolation and dulness." Whether this be so or not, I think that the road to Sporle marks the

further course of the Way. For a short distance by Little Palgrave Hall and Palgrave Hall, the Way has been destroyed by cultivation, but reappears near the line of the Great Eastern Railway between Swaffham and Dereham. Here it is called Procession Lane, corrupted in the locality into "Sessions Lane." Then the high road between Swaffham and Dereham is crossed and, continuing southwards by Dalton's Plantation, the Way goes over the Thetford and Swaffham branch of the Great Eastern Railway into North Pickenham. From this spot to south of the stream at Threxton the Way appears to be quite lost.

South of the river at Threxton the Way for a time roughly follows the boundary between that parish and Merton, and although planted over in Merton Park, it is still a green trackway where crossed by the roads from Thetford to Watton and Tottington to Thompson. On the Merton Estate it is guarded by gates, but south of the Merton-Tottington road it passes between a fine avenue of beech trees, and further between Shaker's Furze and Cherry-row Plantation, where it is bordered by wastes of heather and bracken. In Thompson it passes a big barrow surrounded by a deep ditch and covered with sand-sedge, and by the west end of Thompson Water. Between Thompson Water and Roudham Heath is the most beautiful part of Peddar's Way. The sandy track is bounded by dense pine and larch woods, whose solitude is most impressive. Sometimes the silence is oppressive, at others the vagrom wind makes merry music in the branches. Pine needles, moss, lichen, and velvety turf make a carpet that no weaver can approach, either for softness or beauty, and here the casual traveller may

be forgiven if he desires to linger long. It is a track which craves no footfall to break its loneliness, which seems to have outlived its utility. On the bounds of Hockham and Wretham and in the latter parish there is a "Galley Hill," and it has been pointed out that these generally represent early work. At Wretham the "Stone Brig" is passed, and Peddar's Way—slightly diverted—is crossed by the railway. Three pieces of land close by are known as Kettle Brigg, Upper Kettle Brigg, and Lower Kettle Brigg—probably a corruption of the Danish surname Ketel. At Wretham "Stone Brig" the Court for the Shropham Hundred was formerly held. On its way southward, it is bordered on the West by an ancient row of gnarled Scotch pines, and on the east by a high hedge of crab-apple, field maple and hawthorn.

Where Peddar's Way leaves the pines and hawthorns for the wind-swept expanses of Roudham Heath, the area is known as Roudham "Scutes," evidently a corruption of "skirts," a not uncommon name for the borders of a parish. Near here there are three pits by the Way, one being "Thieves' Pit," so called because it is alleged that when Illington Hall was robbed many years ago, the thieves left their horses, which had their shoes reversed, at this spot. Just north of the railway line Peddar's Way is joined by the "Drove." Blomefield says that Roudham Cross stood "upon the great road leading from Thetford to Norwich," and as it was visible in some part of the Hundred of Guiltcross, which was anciently spelt "Gydecross," suggested that it gave its name to the Hundred. The remaining stones were carried to Harling about 1730 by a Mr. Wright, who was then lord of the manor. So far as I am aware, the only

indication of the exact locality of this cross is furnished by Ogilby's *Britannia*, 1675, and subsequent editions. There it is shown as standing at the north-east corner of the crossing of Peddar's Way and the road from Norwich to Thetford.

On the field at Brettenham which bounds Peddar's Way on the west Roman coins have been found in abundance, and quite on the line of the track in January, 1907, were found two skulls and one skeleton, with iron spear 16 inches in length, the skull part of a helmet, part of the blade of a sword or dagger, and what may have been the boss of a wooden shield. For some distance around excavation revealed ashes, bones, and pieces of pottery, some of the last-named Samian ware with animal ornamentation. It seems probable that this was the burial place of a Roman soldier or soldiers. In this same field a few years previously while chalk was being taken from a pit, a human skeleton was discovered standing upright in a "sand pocket" in the face of the quarry. Other finds have included bronze fibulæ, rings, keys, a thimble, a bead of blue glass and a quantity of pottery.

The Way is lost at the marshland bordering the Thet, which was crossed at Drove Way Ford, but reappears on the chalk ridge between that river and the Little Ouse, where it is a parish boundary, and a proof of its antiquity is furnished by the road from Riddlesworth which at the Shadwell lane turning follows Peddar's Way for about 150 yards, though until a few years ago the land near by was heathland, and the road could more reasonably have gone from the cross-roads. North of the road from Rushford to Harling, there is a well-marked ridge planted with pines, and south of this it runs alongside the plantation,

is bordered by fine banks and overgrown with giant bracken and ancient hawthorns. In a map published in 1836 Peddar's Way is shown as a good road quite down to the Little Ouse which was crossed by a ford called the Blackwater, probably giving its name to the contiguous Suffolk Hundred of Blackbourne. There is still a Blackwater Carr at Riddlesworth, in which a pine marten was once trapped, and two other plantations also perpetuate the name. On the northern side of the ford Peddar's Way is the boundary between the parishes of Rushford and West Harling, and on the southern between the parishes of Rushford and Knettishall, while on the Norfolk side Riddlesworth just touches the ford, which is overlooked by a tumulus on the Suffolk side, and there are two other fine ones in the vicinity.

After crossing the Little Ouse the track, on Rushford Heath, Suffolk, seems for a time almost indistinguishable, but up the southward hill beyond the road to Knettishall is well-defined with a big earthen bank on the westward. Beyond this it leaves Breckland and its course is somewhat doubtful.

THE "DROVE" ROAD

Neither so long nor so important a prehistoric trackway as the Icknield Way or Peddar's Way, the "Drove" road is entirely within the confines of Breckland, and is in some respects more interesting than either of the two more famous roads. It connects Peddar's Way on Roudham Heath with the fenland at Hockwold and has a course of some 14 miles terminating at Blackdyke.

In the early part of last century the "Drove" was one of the chief means of communication for the big

flocks of sheep and herds of cattle that came from the fenland into Norfolk. With the advent of the railways, the road gradually fell into disuse, and save where it forms the main highway between Hockwold and Weeting, is now a green or sandy trackway bordered by low earthen banks and marked by irregular wheel-tracks, giving vistas of miles of heather and bracken, of straggling "belts" of larch, beech, or pine, or of stone-covered "brecks," though at one point it overlooks several reaches of the river Little Ouse, with its bordering marshland, and also passes near four of the meres. Its western termination is at Blackdyke, Hockwold, on the "skirt" land which borders the great fen plain, and it seems certain that the earliest peoples who used it arrived at this point in coracles or dug-outs from the islets in the fens, or the high ground on its borders.

After crossing the road from Lakenheath to Feltwell, the "Drove" forms the main street of Wilton village, where it passes a stone cross 15 feet in height, rising from a pedestal 4 feet in height. For over 2 miles eastward the road is still metalled, about midway passing through a gap in the "Devil's Dyke" or "Fen Dyke." The first and only break in the "Drove" road occurs at Weeting, but there is not the slightest doubt as to its course. Why it was here diverted can now be only a matter of conjecture, but it follows that any vehicle going from Brandon to Wilton must now go round three sides of a square instead of the obviously nearer way by the fourth side. Foot passengers can still follow the old trackway.

From near Weeting Rectory a track known as the "Pilgrim's Walk" formerly ran northwards through

Weeting Park. It can still be traced through the fields to the northward, having a width of 20 feet and raised 2 feet 6 inches. In the eighteenth century, Blomefield, the Norfolk topographer, thus described it :

“ In the fields of *Weting* north of the town is a greenway called *Walsingham Way*, used (as it is said) by pilgrims on their way to the Lady of *Walsingham*, a *madona* of such repute that the *Galaxia* or *Milky Way* was called by people of these parts the *Walsingham Way* as pointing to that angle ; here was formerly a stone cross, now broke into two pieces, commonly called the Stump Crosses.”

These still lie in a plantation on Mount Ephraim, and as they are of Barnack Stone must date from before A.D. 1400. The cross is close to two large ditch-encircled barrows.

After crossing a small brook, the only stream on its course, the “Drove” passes a poplar-crowned barrow known as “Pepper” Hill, said to be so called because from its summit Oliver Cromwell “peppered” Weeting Castle, a mile away !

By deeply-rutted turf or over wastes of sand the “Drove” then climbs the mile-long western slope of Bromehill, and from near the big poplar at the top those with good eyesight can discern Ely Cathedral 18 miles distant across the fens, while in the valley of the Little Ouse are the red roofs of Brandon. On the eastern slope of Bromehill the trackway descends through a plantation which provides the most delightful vistas on its course. At the foot of the slope for a couple of hundred yards its course is a sandy desert, with an abundance of flints, practically all of which show signs of human workmanship. Here the track is closely approached by a northern bend of the Little Ouse, and this must have been the most

important point on its entire length. Evidence of this is evidenced by the huge earthen banks which run from Grime's Graves to the marshland, by the astonishing number of flint implements lying on the surface, and even more so by the fragments of pottery and the abundance of "pot-boilers," which denote a lengthy occupation. That the "Drove" was also a Roman way, though never a made road, is proved by the intermixture hereabouts of Castor and Upchurch ware with the rougher quartz-besprinkled potsherds of the Bronze Age, and the finding of Roman bracelets and flue-tiles.

In Santon parish the "Drove" is a mere sandy track-way in a region of extreme desolation (a "sand-ton" the parish is in very truth), here and there bounded by earthen banks of uncertain age. After crossing the highway between Thetford and Mundford, an even wilder district is entered, where the hundreds of acres of bracken, the dismal-looking pine plantations, with the track in places almost lost among the encroaching heather-tufts, make a realization of the primeval aspect of the Way by no means difficult. Leaving West Tofts Heath the parish of Croxton is entered by what was formerly "The Gap," and the road was known as "The Greenway." After crossing the Thetford-Watton highway, for half a mile the "Drove" is bordered on the north by a wildling hedge, the only one on its heathland course, the adjacent fields all having the Norse "Grimmer" in their names—"Grimmer's Breck," etc. A little to the south of the track is a fine barrow known as "Mickle Hill," close to which a few years ago was found a Teutonic bronze mount of the fourth century, A.D.—one of five of the kind found in England—which is now in Norwich Castle

Museum. The road then runs on the narrow ridge between the Devil's Punch Bowl and Fowlmere. Across further far-stretching heaths, the "Drove" is a parochial boundary between Croxton and Wretham, and furnishes extensive views. On the "brecks" adjoining the trackway here, as all along its course, there are abundant relics of the workmanship of Neolithic man, and both by Fowlmere and Langmere there appear to have been permanent settlements. Passing south of Langmere, and half a mile north of Ringmere, the Drove continues on open heathland, beneath the railway line from Roudham Junction to Watton, and about a mile and a half east of Langmere unites with Peddar's Way and terminates its course.

From its likeness to prehistoric trackways in other parts of the country, its connection with Peddar's Way, the abundance of relics of Neolithic man found along its entire length, and the evidence furnished by subsidiary roads and trackways, there seems every reason to believe that the "Drove" is a remarkably well-preserved channel of communication used by prehistoric man, and one of the most interesting public trackways in the country.



SMUGGLERS' ROAD, BODNEY



SMUGGLERS' ROAD, BLACKWATER FORD

CHAPTER IX

Rabbit Farms

NATURALISTS consider that the original home of the rabbit was probably the western Mediterranean basin, but that it must have extended its range to Britain in very early times is evident from the discovery of its remains in the peat-bogs and elsewhere. It is probable that it formed a not unimportant article of diet for our Saxon forefathers, and its warm fur was very early utilized for clothing. Soon after the Norman Conquest many of the manorial lords had grants of free-warren, that is, the exclusive right of killing beasts and fowls of warren within certain limits. Some of the sandy portions of East Anglia, particularly much of Breckland, became particularly noted for their "conies." Black rabbits were mentioned in the Paston Letters about 1490, and the Household Book of Thomas Kytson, of Hengrave, contained the following entry in October, 1573: "For baiting my Mr. his horse at Brandon, etc. For vj Black Coney skins to fur my Mrs. Night gown iiij s, iiij d."

This indicates that even at that day the fur had a decided market value. In the next century Evelyn in his diary mentions that between Euston and Thetford

"a tumbler shew'd his extraordinary addresse in the Warren. I also saw a Decoy; much pleas'd with the stratagem."

The sandy portions of Norfolk and Suffolk apparently abounded with rabbits. Nevertheless the penalties for taking them from enclosed lands were very severe.

Two cases, one in Suffolk and the other in Norfolk, will evidence the severity of the law a century ago. At a Quarter Session held at Bury St. Edmunds in January, 1805, a man named G. Cross was convicted of stealing a trap and two rabbits from Wangford Warren, and was sentenced to six months' solitary confinement and hard labour, and to be publicly whipped at Brandon. In 1813, Robert Plum, aged twenty-two, and Rush Lingwood, aged eighteen, were indicted at the Norfolk Assizes, held at Thetford, for entering the Warren of Thomas Robertson, of Hockwold, farmer and warrener, and taking one coney from a trap. Plum was transported for seven years, and Lingwood received two years' imprisonment.

At the present day some of the Breckland farmers pay their rent from what they realize by the sale of rabbits; a few cultivate rabbits as their sole crop. One such farm consists of somewhat less than a thousand acres of poor soil, most of it heath or "breck," with small areas alleged to be arable, broken and bordered by far-spreading pine "belts," with ancient woodland on one side, and a strip of river-side alluvium on another. From the farm-house as a centre radiate tracks to various parts of the heathland. These are crossed by other tracks—quite a network of them. Some may follow the lines of those used by prehistoric man. All are unmade, simply wheel and horse tracks, not always clear of ling

and bracken. To the rabbits these ancient ways are pleasant avenues for gossip. The turf is consequently kept close-cropped, the heather-shoots only slightly longer than the turf. The tracks are all named. To the warrener they are the streets of his city. There is the Hay Track, the Cross-Roads, the Shutting-Off Road, the Dogfold Road, the Highwrong Road, and many another.

To a stranger the belts and tracks are most deceptive. One fir and larch belt is very like another; the tracks are almost indistinguishable. The result is, that anyone not knowing the landmarks on the skyline may wander about from one "breck" to another, and fail utterly to distinguish in which direction he is going. Things, however, are not so bad now as before the trees were planted. Then, there were practically no landmarks at all. At least one man from the nearest town lost his way on the heathland and was frozen to death. Now the chief danger to a person wandering from the track is of breaking his leg in an overgrown rabbit-hole, or of standing on a viper.

Yet, despite its appearance of eternal immutability, the heathland is changing year by year. For here the rabbit is king. He flourishes, and the heathland looks in parts like a tropical desert, in others the heather and grass are short and the turf springy. He is reduced to a remnant, and the bents and sand-sedge become masters of the situation, and the wind sweeps over them and makes a soft rustling as blade grates against blade. Where the rabbit really holds sway, on the western slope of a long valley not far from the Little Ouse, hardly a blade of grass will grow. He has tunnelled the slope from top to bottom and kicked out the sand with his powerful

hind-legs. Winds and the law of gravitation do the rest, and the result is a miniature Sahara. Viewing even this comparatively small area in a gale, it is quite easy to imagine the great travelling sands of the seventeenth century, which almost buried the village of Downham, and nearly blocked the river. And it was the owner of this very farm who is alleged to have said at Bury Market, when asked where his farm was : " Sometimes in Norfolk and sometimes in Suffolk ; it depends which way the wind blows." There is constant movement of the tiny particles, and rivulets of minute grains appear to be almost always running down the slope. And so in the course of ages the bottom of the valley becomes filled up, the slope less steep, and the face of the country is changed—by the rabbit.

To ramble in such a spot is a pursuit fraught with some amount of uncertainty, possibly danger, as I have many times experienced. For there are the obvious rabbit burrows and there are hundreds not obvious, not now used, and with their mouths blocked with brown sand. Yet to them all there are wonderful underground ramifications, and the roofs of the tunnels are thin and of sand. So that at times hardly a yard is passed without a hurried and undignified descent into the depths, sometimes up to the waist.

Further evidence of the effect of rabbits on the landscape is furnished by a pit not far distant. Fifteen years ago its sides were cliff-like, clean cut from top to bottom. But there were several feet of sand above the chalk, and in this the rabbits started to burrow. They gradually honeycombed the top edge of the pit, and big pieces of turf were broken off and dropped to the foot of the cliff.

Year after year rabbits have burrowed and loosened the soil, rain, wind, and frost rendering further assistance, until now, at almost any point, it is possible for a man to climb from top to bottom of the pit on the debris. A few miles away is Thetford Warren, on which, a few decades ago, the rabbits flourished amazingly. They were treated almost like domestic animals, fed in winter, and protected as far as possible from their natural enemies. But times altered, and because the rabbits were supposed to be antagonistic in their habits to the winged game, the rodents were ruthlessly shot down. And now, a rabbit on the three-thousand acres of this warren is a rarity. The effect on vegetation has been most marked. What was a sandy waste was at first almost covered with lichen, as soft to the foot as an Oriental mat. Where the lichen had been longer established, and had prevented the moisture in the thin layer of surface soil from being entirely evaporated, the golden bents established themselves, and in their turn gave shelter to tiny patches of haresfoot trefoil, or prickly stems of the viper's bugloss. The winged seeds of the ragwort and thistle also produced plants after their kind, while that pest, the Canadian fleabane established itself, and with its thousands of parachute-like seeds extended its range almost indefinitely until the carpet of vegetation became more dense and there was a severer struggle for existence.

Of the rabbit farm referred to about one-tenth of the total area was cultivated, the crops having to be enclosed by wire-netting to prevent their total destruction by ground game. But even this was not always sufficient, for rabbits have been seen to jump wire-netting $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, and unless it is sunk deeply into the ground they

will burrow beneath it, and so get to the crop. One night a piece of lucerne was left partially unfenced, and after an hour or two all the holes leading to it were blocked. The next morning over 200 rabbits were caught in it, three dozen being in one burrow about 6 feet long.

Some of the sandy hillocks are the dwelling-places of vast numbers of rabbits—thirteen dozen have been taken from one comparatively small area—the burrows passing over and under each other in a wonderful network of tunnelling. In stiffer soil the burrows are fewer and rabbits in consequence more inclined to bolt. I have seen the hole from which two rabbits were dug out at a depth of 9 feet, the ferrets having been put into the burrow the evening of one day and the rabbits dug out the next.

From February to September the rabbits follow the command to increase and multiply and replenish the earth; from September to February the farmer, his sons, and warreners, take toll of the great community which lives in underground dwellings. Day after day nets are out, and ferrets and lurchers are at work, aided and guided by men with a profound and intimate knowledge of the ways of the wild creatures in whose company they spend so much of their time. One day's rabbiting I particularly recall. The previous night a meadow near the river had been enclosed, after the rabbits had come down from the higher heathy ground to the land nearer the river, where the grass was more luscious. While they were feeding in fancied security, several hundreds of yards of netting were put up, and though the meadow itself had a number of burrows, a great many of the rabbits found their retreat cut off by this means. The nets are 100 yards long and about 3 feet high, and sometimes 1,200 or 1,300 yards of

netting is put out. The nets are fastened on pointed hazel stakes, which are stuck in the ground, and are so hung that the top part slopes inwards, and about 6 inches of the bottom part lies slack on the ground on the inner side—that is, the side from which the rabbits will bolt. The retreat of the rabbits was thus cut off north, east, and west, while on the south the river provided an impassable barrier for all but the most venturesome, for a rabbit, when hard pressed, will sometimes take to water, and swim across a stream of fair width. The area thus enclosed was left all night, but one or two rabbits who wished to go home, and found they could not, made valiant attempts by biting quite through the bottom cord of the nets, a feat that resulted in no benefit to themselves, owing to the slackness of the net. The rabbits remained on the meadow all night, and in the morning four men—clad in smocks, the colour of the tawny heathland—set forth to kill as many as they could. Their outfit consisted of three lurcher bitches, several ferrets in boxes, and “digging-staffs,” the last named a long-handled, narrow, spoon-shaped spade with a hook at the top of the handle, utilized in several distinct ways. Two of the lurchers, which are a cross between a shepherd’s dog and a greyhound, and hunt both by sight and scent, were fairly old dogs, with vast experience, while the other was younger. Men, dogs, and ferrets having reached a place in the enclosed area, where there were several burrows, two ferrets, which were unfed, were taken out of the boxes. The ferrets were first turned in the burrows unmuzzled, and directly their presence was made known, the rabbits fled pell-mell from their hereditary enemies. Directly the rabbit came out of the

"bolt-hole" he dashed for dear life to the northward. In most cases he had gone but a few yards when a lurcher caught him up, and brought him, shrieking vigorously, back to his master, who at once broke the rabbit's neck, and "huddled" (hurdled) it, that is, passed the blade of a knife between the bone of the thigh and the great sinew, and thrust the other foot through the hole thus made. This is for convenience of carrying and packing.

A few rabbits reached the net, into which they bolted headlong, and were cast back by the slackness, or got their heads or paws entangled in the meshes. The dogs also paid no attention to the nets, which pulled them up when they were going at a tremendous rate, and for a second or two, dog and rabbit and net seemed inextricably mingled. But dog and rabbit were soon sorted out, with the rabbit always in the dog's mouth. Bringing it to his master, he waited for it to be taken from his mouth, and sometimes seemed unwilling to release his capture. There were no misses; the lurchers always got the rabbit if he remained above ground, and did not seek temporary safety in another burrow. In the early part of the morning the ferrets were unmuzzled and secured by lines fastened to a swivel on a small collar round their necks. With 5 or 6 yards of line on the ferret it was easy to withdraw it when its work was accomplished. But there came a time when the rabbits refused to bolt, and then "cooped" ferrets were turned in loose. The warrener "coops" a ferret with a special kind of string, tying a knot with a small loop, putting this round the animal's neck so that the knot is on top and one loop round each jaw, the top jaw being fastened to the loop close by the knot. The subsequent operations required the greatest skill and

promptitude on the part of the warrener. With hearing trained to the utmost acuteness, he listens for the meeting of ferret and rabbit, and as soon as this takes place, it is his endeavour to dig down with the utmost expedition, and secure the rabbit, for although the ferrets cannot bite the rabbit, they can scratch its fur off with their fore paws, and sometimes the "coop" is so fixed as to allow the ferret just to nip with its teeth. There was not much variety in the deaths of rabbit after rabbit. When one burrow was dug open, in it were found two rabbits with tiny punctures in the jugular vein, which experienced eyes at once saw was the work of a stoat. In the next burrow he was found, and promptly tapped on the head with sufficient severity to end his career. There is no greater pest than the stoat in a rabbit warren. All the rabbits were of the ordinary greyish-brown colour with white underneath, with one exception. This had fur about 3 inches in length, was said to be the result of a cross—apparently of an "Angora" strain—and was known as a "shrog" rabbit. When the spoils were counted they were found to number thirteen dozen as the result of the morning's work. This was by no means a record, as 200 rabbits are not infrequently taken at one setting of the nets, and the record number for the farm is 277.

Then "Jack" the donkey, was brought up, and the nets carefully folded up and put in the cart, the hazel stakes in a sack, and the dead rabbits were slung by their crossed hindlegs on stakes which were placed across the cart. The paraphernalia was then all removed to the farm, where the ferrets were fed, their work for the day being done.

In the afternoon an effort was made to get rabbits on the "course" and from a sporting point of view this was far more exciting than the work of the morning. Down the river was a narrow strip of marshland, dividing the stream from the light land of the heath. On the marsh there were no burrows, but the grass and cover has an attraction for the rabbits, some of whom are generally hiding in its fastnesses. All present were pressed into the service to prevent the rabbits bolting from this shelter to their burrows on the higher ground, but despite all precautions a number made a desperate and successful dash for safety. As rapidly as possible the nets were staked up, until some 600 yards were out, surrounding the piece of marshland on the heath side, the river forming the other boundary. When the preliminaries were completed, men in line, and dogs scouring the marsh a few yards in front, proceeded to beat the rough ground. A few rabbits preferred to lie hidden, in the expectation of being passed over, and these the dogs picked up before they could move. The majority, however, when disturbed dashed off for the heath, and were brought up sharp by the net, the lurchers rarely being more than a few feet behind. As a rule, they grabbed the rabbits by the shoulders, but occasionally picked them up in most peculiar ways. When the rabbits were caught in the net, the dogs sometimes found it more convenient to get at them by jumping over, and this they did very gracefully and with the utmost ease. A seven-year-old lurcher was almost human in her appreciation of the excitement of the proceedings, her methods of overcoming the wiles of the rabbits, and her keenness in doing her appointed work.

There was in the river a belt of rushes, and here several frightened rabbits took shelter. But this particular lurcher scented them, swam across, and picked up one after the other. Only one got away, and the oldest lurcher was so disappointed that when the proceedings were nearly over she beat back on her own account and found this solitary rabbit. One or two rabbits hearing the turmoil behind, tried to get through the nets far in front, but the one word "net" sent the dogs searching until they found their prey. Some forty rabbits were thus taken off this narrow strip of marshland, every one being captured by the dogs, whose keenness and intelligence was most remarkable.

There are other ways—legitimate and illegitimate—of killing rabbits, and some of the old-fashioned poachers were very successful in securing them by means of snares. To accomplish this great skill was necessary. For rabbits the noose of twisted brass wire was placed one thumb's height above the ground; for hares two thumb's height, the hand of the operator being laid on the ground and the thumb erected perpendicularly as a guide. Should the noose be set too low it is either seen by the rabbit or touched as it is crouching to feed; should it be too high it will strike the rabbit on the ears.

Poachers sometimes net cultivated land at night, using stakes very sparingly to hold up the net. Small quick docile ferrets are preferred for the work—some poachers have a preference for white ferrets, and with a fast worker the rabbits bolt with wonderful rapidity.

To discourage poachers from working with lurchers, on parts of the open heath near main roads barbed wire is fastened to stakes about a foot from the ground, and

set in zigzag fashion, and poachers who value their dogs give such areas a wide berth. Mantraps, for which there is happily now no use, hang on some of the trees in remote parts of the heathland, rarely visited except during the rabbiting season; in some of the older plantations spring-guns are still set, though now they point downwards, and there are no wires so as to make them of value in the detection of poachers. A few notice-boards, the lettering on which is barely legible, may also still be transcribed by the patient investigator to read: "Beware. Dog spears are set in this plantation." Part of the farm is covered with thickly-growing sand-sedge, which forms splendid cover for vermin of all kinds, and for this reason is burned down in the autumn. Stoats find safety beneath the leaves, and game goes in and is killed. Eight stoats were caught in one trap among the sedge in a week. The farmer, by imitating the cry of a frightened rabbit can lure weasels and stoats from their shelter in order to shoot them. The animal, on emerging from the bracken, rushes, or sedge among which it has been hiding or working, generally sits upon its hind legs, like a dog begging, and in this attitude is shot.

Throughout the year rabbits provide many interesting quarters of an hour for a patient watcher, who may see the doe when leaving her litter carefully fill up the entrance of the burrow with sand. In severe weather, when unable to obtain their ordinary food, rabbits will completely strip the bark off trees to a height of a foot or two from the ground, evidencing a particular liking for hawthorn and broom, not infrequently to the destruction of the bushes.

It is also interesting to note that the rabbits of the "brecks" and arable fields are of a much larger size than those on the heath, apparently having access to a better food-supply. Occasionally they suffer greatly from severe weather, though such a hailstorm as that in August, 1843, when many thousands were killed by jagged bits of ice, some of them $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, are fortunately of rare occurrence.

Until a few years ago Thetford Warren was one of the best-known rabbit-yielding areas in Breckland. Soon after the Norman Conquest right of free-warren was granted on it, and among the possessions of the Thetford Canons in 1338 was a Coningerfield Shift which was probably part of it. On May 6, 1834, John Drew Salmon, F.L.S., wrote in his diary "The white rabbits very conspicuous on the (Thetford) Warren as they kept moving about." On March 7, 1837, Salmon wrote: "Afternoon walk'd across the (Thetford) Warren to see Mr. Gardiner's new stock of rabbits; they came from Lincolnshire, and are of a silver blue colour. The fur is consider'd of more value than ye common grey. I recollect seeing the same sort exposed for sale in Boston Market where they are considered as the common sort." They are frequently employed to stock warrens, as they bred true to colour in the open if the ordinary wild rabbits were rigorously excluded. For many years enormous quantities of the "silver-greys" were killed yearly in "tipes." Each morning during the season the result of the night's work was taken to the Warren Lodge, where they were skinned, the skins being sold for 18s. 6d. per dozen, while the carcasses were also disposed of, and totalled about 20,000 a year. The pitfalls in which they were trapped were

called "tipes," an archaic word formerly in use in Yorkshire, and not known to have been used elsewhere than Thetford in the Eastern Counties. As a rule these "tipes" were about 8 feet in depth, almost circular, and lined with chalk and flint on the inside, so as to render it impossible for rabbits to burrow and so escape. The top of the "tipe" consisted of an iron trap-door turning on a swivel. On this food would be placed and immediately a rabbit went on the trap-door in search of dainties it was cast into the pit beneath. For the good reason that rabbits feed more in the night than the day, these "tipes" were usually worked in the hours of darkness, and eleven or twelve dozen rabbits were sometimes found in a "tipe" as the result of a single night's work. In winter six teams of horses were employed to cart food to the rabbits, hay and furze being principally used. The huge lanterns used by the warreners remained at the Warren Lodge until a few years ago, as evidence of an almost forgotten prosperity.

The Warren Lodge is a curious building, almost on the highest part of the warren and of great antiquity. The older portion is square, of two stories, with a thatched roof. The walls are of local flints, over 3 feet thick, and strongly bound together by cement-like mortar. The only entrance is by a narrow doorway, the angles of which are quoined with freestone, blocks of which are also built into the walls—one in the upper story has a trefoil opening—with a number of Roman tiles, including nineteen over the arch of the door. There is a solitary window on the ground floor, about a foot square, and protected by a number of iron bars which would render it impossible to effect an entrance. One of the rooms

on the ground floor was devoted to the racks, etc., used in drying rabbit-skins, while another contained the traps, nets, and big lanterns used by the warreners. In one corner of the bedroom is a stone cell with a niche, presumably for an image, and from this room a tube about 6 inches square gives communication with the porch, and facilitated conversation at night. The spiral stone staircase is very narrow and so low that there is not enough room to stand upright. The ancient well, in what was probably at one time the courtyard, is $103\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, and is worked by a crank and pulley, one bucket going down as the other comes up. Thomas Martin, F.S.A., the historian of Thetford, was here in December, 1740, when he and two companions dined off "three fat coneys."

CHAPTER X

In Bloomfield's Country

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD, "the Suffolk Poet" as he is somewhat ambitiously termed, was born in the parish of Honington, on December 3, 1766. His father was the village tailor, and his mother kept a dame's school. As to his poetry, we need hold neither with Dr. Drake that "in true pastoral imagery and simplicity" nothing since the days of Theocritus had compared with "The Farmer's Boy"; with Russell Lowell, who said that it was "too largely ballasted with prose"; nor with Charles Lamb, who said "he makes me sick." Many of Bloomfield's poems describe the scenery in the neighbourhood of his native place, and will perhaps be chiefly remembered in future for their accuracy as pictures of Suffolk rural life in the days of the flail and sickle.

Along the eight miles of road between Thetford and Honington it is still easy to follow the musings of the poet over a century ago, as he trod the same path. Even in Thetford itself the ruins of the Cluniac Priory at the west end of the town bring to mind his reference to his visit.

To where of old rich abbeys smil'd
In all the pomp of Gothic taste,
By fond tradition proudly styl'd
The mighty "City in the East,"



CASTLE HILL, THETFORD



THE HALING PATH, THETFORD

while the Castle Hill and its surrounding earthworks he referred to as

The Danish mounds of partial green
Still, as each mould'ring tower decays,
Far o'er the bleak unwooded scene
Proclaim their wondrous length of days.

Now, we do not consider the mounds Danish, nor is the scene bleak and unwooded.

In Thetford also, the old inns recall my own early memories of the "horkeys" associated therewith, and of Bloomfield's fine poem—perhaps the most valuable in an archæological sense—of "The Horkey" which describes this now almost forgotten custom to celebrate the end of the harvest. Waggon from the farms in the villages would bring the harvest-men, their wives and families, to the town and a feast would be prepared at some inn, the farmer being the donor. Bloomfield faithfully describes the preparations for the feast, the bringing home of the last load of corn—the "Horkey load"—the disappearance of the beef and ale and the weariness to which this gave rise; how the men went to "hallow largess" (eight centuries after "largesse" was introduced by the Normans), and how the women pinned their coats together and had to pay for their practical joking. And further, how they lingered till morning and went home full of joy—and ale.

The first village on the way from Thetford to Honington is Euston, and the first mile of the present road thereto is bordered by Scotch pine trees and dwarf pine hedges, and is known as "The Deal Row." Fifty years ago it was nothing more than a sandy heathland track, difficult to travel in dry weather and almost impassable

in wet. It was not the ancient road to Euston, yet Dr. Raven, deceived by its appearance, considered it Roman. Readers of Bloomfield will remember that in the summer of 1802, he walked from Sapiston to Thetford, passing Euston Hall on the way. In his poem "Barnham Water" he alludes to the "one small streamlet" that "crossed the way" and urged that "every charm was incomplete, for Barnham Water wants a shade." He continues:

Long and delightful was the dream,
A waking dream that Fancy yields,
Till with regret I left the stream
And plung'd across the barren fields.

The next lines seem further to associate the poem with the old road between Euston and Thetford, for after leaving the streamlet he says:

Near, on a slope of burning sand
The shepherd boys had met to play,
To hold the plains at their command
And mark the Trav'ler's leafless way.

This description exactly fits Elder Hill, which, like Barrow Hill, south-west of Thetford, is an esker of gravel left by glaciers. Before reaching this, however, on the right of the modern road to Euston, a wide view of Norfolk and Suffolk may be obtained from the highest point of the "Deal Row," the horizon extending at least a dozen miles from north to south. Along the Little Ouse valley may be traced part of the town of Thetford, the Scotch pines and furze of Barnham Common, the grey-towered church of Barnham St. Gregory's nestling among the trees, the Suffolk river-

slope splashed with heather, with wood receding beyond wood until lost in the blue haze near Rymer Point.

Thence the road traverses a long slope to the bridge over the Little Ouse, near which are spruce firs in whose spreading branches the golden-crested wrens nest, yellow irises dot the banks in June, sedge-warblers chatter in the low bushes, and the glint of a flashing kingfisher is occasionally seen. Here there is a slight fall in the stream, which ripples for a yard or two between fairly large stones with a musical gurgle reminiscent of the Scottish glens or Yorkshire dales rather than the prosaic soft-flowing Norfolk or Suffolk stream. Thence the road is bordered by oak trees of great girth, until the village of Euston is reached.

This is certainly one of the prettiest villages in Suffolk, a result chiefly due to the art that assists nature. The nameless stream that flows from Sapiston and Bardwell and unites with the Little Ouse west of the village has been widened, ornamental bridges thrown cross it, and an over-fall formed by a dam. Here, in the great frost of 1814, a flock of sheep crossed safely on the ice, the shepherd (who narrated the incident to the writer) watching the while with the utmost trepidation. By an expansion of the river a small lake was also formed. The huge cedars near the park gates add their element of picturesqueness to the landscape; the ancient, low-parapeted stone bridge, the magnificent oaks, beech, limes and elms, the quaint lath-and-plaster dwellings embowered in creepers, and the village green all help to form the pleasant picture which is the stranger's impression of Euston. Its present aspect is the result of over 200 years' planning, pruning and preservation.

The Rookwoods were a well-known Suffolk family, with headquarters at Coldham Hall, Stanningfield, while a younger branch was established at Euston, at least as early as the fifteenth century, as in 1479 the will was proved of Roger Rokewoode of Euston, Squier, who made mention of the "wey ledyng from Euston Mylle to Rosshworthe." Edward of that name joined with other Roman Catholic gentlemen of the county in protesting their loyalty to Queen Elizabeth, and abjuring the papal power of deposing sovereigns. He received the Queen with all respect on August 10, 1578, when she was his guest at Euston Hall. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him suffering the penalty for being a Popish recusant. He was fined a large sum, and imprisoned in Bury Gaol, where he died, ruined in estate. Dr. Raven says that Euston was sold to keep his family from starvation; Mason says that it became forfeited to the Crown. According to Evelyn the estate was sold by Sir T. Rookwood to Sir Henry Bennett, who in 1663 was made Earl of Arlington and Viscount Thetford. He was a member of the notorious Cabal ministry, was driven from power in 1674, but through the King's influence was made Lord Chamberlain, paying £10,000 for the office. He built Euston Hall about 1670, and some of the present building dates from that time. Tradition says that two previous halls at Euston were burned down. Evelyn was a frequent visitor in Arlington's time, and wrote: "My lord himself, who built the house and restored the church—dedicated to St. Genevieve—was given to no expensive vice but building, and to have all things rich, polite, and princely." Lord Arlington's only daughter was married to the Earl of Euston, who afterwards

became the first Duke of Grafton. She was twelve and he fifteen. His mother was the beautiful and notorious Lady Castlemaine; his father, the King. The first Duke killed the Earl of Derby's brother in a duel, and was himself killed at the siege of Cork. The Duchess was the heiress of Lord Arlington, and the estate thus came to the Graftons and has remained in their possession ever since. The fountain-stone of the village church bears this inscription:

"Isabelle, Duchesse of Grafton and Countesse of Ewston, layed this stone, 21st day of April, 1676."

The church is one of the very few sacred edifices in the Eastern Counties constructed solely of stone, and much of the exterior has been cemented; it contains many interesting memorials.

During the ownership of Lord Arlington Charles II was a not infrequent visitor—and after his death in 1691 his devoted Queen, Catherine of Braganza, lived for a time at the Hall. Her Confessor Father Diaz recorded in his diary that "Her Majestie lives content here with her familie; the place is very pretty, and hass all the conveniencys that wee can desire, except that there is no cows." This sad reproach has since been removed.

Defoe visited Euston in 1722 and described it as "a place capable of all that is pleasant and delightful in Nature, and improved by art to every extreme that Nature is able to produce." Sir Thomas Robinson, of Rokeby Park, Yorkshire, was there in 1731, and in a letter to Lord Carlisle, says: "I was two days at the Duke of Grafton's, at Euston. The house was built by his mother's father, and, though of so short a stand-

ing, is ready to fall, being so very slightly finished, and all the materials so very bad. The garden, of about 80 acres, is fenced on one side from the park by a brick fosse, as at Sir Robert's (Walpole) and the slope from the terrace in the garden so wide that the wall is planted with fruit trees, and so disposed that they have a sufficient quantity of sun to ripen their respective fruits. On the other side of the fence, between the garden and the park, is a very pretty rivulet cut in a winding and irregular manner, with now and then a little lake, etc., and over it in one approach to the house is a wooden bridge, built by Lord Arlington with an arch that appears almost flat, and from hence you have a beautiful prospect of the water, which is indeed delightfully disposed. The park is about nine miles about. The Duke has hitherto done very little to it, but is now, entering into a taste, but nature has done so much for him, and his woods and lawns are disposed in so agreeable a manner, that a little art and expense will make it a most charming place. He has a wood out of the park something like Prettywood at Castle Howard, which might be made a noble thing."

In 1764 the Grecian temple in the park was erected by the second Duke. For a century and several decades the rustics told circumstantial tales of the subterranean passage that connected this Temple and the Hall, for purposes which a modern code of morals would not uphold. The absurdity of these fabrications was proved a few years ago when the passage at the Temple was explored and found to descend spirally beneath the building to a chamber fitted up as an ice-house. Walpole visited the mansion in 1753. "Euston," he said, "is

one of the most admired seats in England . . . the house is large and bad ; it was built by Lord Arlington, and stands, as all old houses do, for convenience of water and shelter, in a hole, so it neither sees nor is seen. . . . The park is fine, the old woods excessively so."

From 1765 to 1783 the 3rd Duke of Grafton filled various official stations. He was Secretary of State, First Lord of the Treasury and Lord Privy Seal in different administrations. He hated business, and when needed by the Cabinet usually had to be fetched from Wakefield, Newmarket, or Euston. When Parliament was prorogued in July, 1783, after the formation of the Coalition Ministry, he disapproved of the Confederacy and retired into Suffolk. The ministry was soon dismissed and William Pitt offered the Duke a seat in the Cabinet. He left Euston on December 21, and rattled into London behind four horses on the following day. Pitt and he could not agree, and the Duke posted back to keep Christmas at Euston Hall. Lord Camden, Mr. Fox, and other great men visited him in his retirement. Fox stayed there in October, 1798, and also in the autumn of 1800. Grafton outlived Fox and most of his political contemporaries, and died in 1811. In his later years he spent most of his time at Euston. The sixth Earl of Albemarle, who lived to 1891, remembered very well that when he was a boy of twelve, he saw him riding about the grounds at Euston in a long peach-coloured coat and a three-cornered gold-laced hat. It was the third Duke who so greatly befriended Bloomfield, and Euston is frequently mentioned in his poems :

Where noble Grafton spreads his rich domains
Round Euston's watered vale and sloping plains ;
Where woods and groves in solemn grandeur rise,
Where the kite brooding unmolested flies ;
The woodcock and the painted pheasant race,
The skulking foxes destined for the chase.

Thus is it now, save that the kite is but a memory in the land. Gone too are the ravens that formerly nested in Rubbinghouse Spinney, and "the dappled herd of grazing deer." The visitor may also see in the boundary wall of the garden memorial tablets to famous hounds of days gone by. One to "Trouncer," dated 1788, is especially noteworthy, for, as described in "The Farmer's Boy" :

Each sportsman heard the tidings with a sigh,
When death's cold touch had stopt his tuneful cry ;
And though high deeds and fair exalted praise
In memory liv'd and flowed in rustic lays,
Short was the strain of monumental woe ;
"Foxes rejoice ! here buried lies your foe."

Thetford was for a long period a borough returning two members to Parliament, and one of the seats was in the patronage of the Dukes of Grafton. Thus it comes to pass that when in 1710 Sir Thomas Hanmer, Bart., and Dudley North were returned unopposed, the account of their election expenses includes "Euston Strowers" £1 1s. 6d. and "Euston bells" 10s., the former sum apparently being paid to those who strewed flowers in the path of the candidates.

The exterior of the Hall, which was almost destroyed by fire in 1902, was not beautiful, and the present building is similar in style. In the early part of the nineteenth

century Dr. Gordon Hake visited Euston and was shown over the Hall by the owner. Writing in his *Memoirs of Eighty Years* (1892) Dr. Hake said :

“ There is a grand staircase, on one wall of this was hung a portrait of the Duchess, mother of the first duke, then seven or eight generations ago, a lapse of time when the bar-sinister had ceased to cross the shield ; nevertheless it was retained in the armorial bearings of the family, and this may be regarded as a proper pride.”

He also notes that the “ front entrance was approached through the park gates which, as was an old custom, were never opened except to royalty.”

The park in which the Hall is situated extends more than two miles along the east bank of the river, and covers 1,260 acres, with pleasure grounds of 80 acres, and the estate is said to be not less than 40 miles in circuit. It extends into the parishes of Barnham, Fakenham, Sapiston, and Honington, in addition to Euston.

From the road between Euston and Fakenham (which is the next village on the way to Honington) a pleasant prospect of the Hall and its surroundings may be obtained. Kirby, in the *Suffolk Traveller* (1765), stated that the two villages were divided by “ Champaign lands.” A portion of these, between the river and the road, is now known as “ Hercules Went ”—the “ went ” perhaps being a pre-Roman survival, not unconnected with some earthworks near the river. The present parish is Fakenham Magna. Practically nothing is known of Little Fakenham, though tradition states that the church used to stand on the green west of the Park Houses. It is alleged that in very dry weather it is still possible to trace the founda-

tions, and human bones have been found on the spot. A little north of the church is the Hall, the wing overlooking the churchyard being a portion of the ancient dwelling. East of the old-fashioned garden is a meadow called "Dog-Kennel Close" and beyond the river is another known as "Castle Fen," in which is a small circular earthwork generally known as "The Castle," from the site of which bricks of sixteenth-century design are sometimes dug up.

In Burnt-Hall plantation, north of the river and within 100 yards of it, but east of the village, is an earthwork consisting of a circular rampart and moat. The depth of the rampart from the surface of the ground is 8 feet 3 inches, and the height of the rampart from the bottom of the ditch is 17 feet 9 inches. Between the ramparts across the interior, the distance is 258 feet 9 inches, and the distance from the outside of the ditch on one side to the outside of the ditch on the other is 351 feet 9 inches. On the west side the rampart has been levelled for a short distance, and two cottages, known as "Town Houses," in which old people lived free of rent, formerly stood in the gap. They were one-storied and thatched, and destroyed before 1840. The whole area is now covered with trees and thick undergrowth—beech, elder, lime, sloe, bramble, gooseberry, ivy, honeysuckle, nettles, and woody night-shade. It is locally believed that a hall stood inside the enclosure, and that the banks were thrown up to prevent the water getting in. At some period, as described by Robert Bloomfield, the Hall is supposed to have been burnt, although on an ancient map of the property it is referred to as "Burt Hall." In "The Broken Crutch," Bloomfield says :

His home was in the valley, elms grew round
His moated mansion, and the pleasant sound
Of woodland birds that loud at daybreak sing,
With the first cuckoos that proclaim the spring,
Flock'd round his dwelling ; and his kitchen smoke,
That from the towering rookery upward broke,
Of joyful import to the poor hard by,
Stream'd a glad sign of hospitality ;
So fancy pictures ; but its day is o'er ;
The moat remains, the dwelling is no more !
Its name denotes its melancholy fall,
For village children call the spot "Burnt-Hall."

He alludes to a family named Brooks who lived there, and in the parish registers are records of such early in the eighteenth century. It is, however, improbable that Burnt Hall was a mansion in modern times.

Bloomfield was well acquainted with the village, and his most popular poem, "The Fakenham Ghost," is associated with it. Founded on fact, it narrates how an ancient dame was returning home in the dusk through Euston Park when she heard short quick steps behind, and saw a monstrous shape following.

Then on she sped ; and hope grew strong,
The white park gate in view ;
Which, pushing hard, so long it swung,
That *Ghost* and all pass'd through.

Eventually she fell down fainting at the door of her house, and her daughter and husband rushing out, saw the ghost—an ass's foal. The footpath through the park, the white park gates, the willow shades of Fakenham, the copses and the clamorous rooks are still much as they were when the poem was written ; the "dappled herd of grazing deer" has gone.

There was at least one cousin of the poet, Mrs. Padley, living in the parish a few years ago in a house known as "the old Post Office." The house in which dwelt the heroine of the "Fakenham Ghost" story formerly adjoined it and stood end on to the road, but was pulled down, and the present blacksmith's shop built on the site. The connection of the parish with Bloomfield is not its only literary association, for Jocelin de Brakelond mentions that in the days of the great Abbot Samson, a tournament was proclaimed "between Thetford and St. Edmundsbury," and Carlyle (*Past and Present*) suggests that it might have been "in the Euston region, on Fakenham Heights, midway between these two localities."

Yet even this quiet village has been the scene of a tragedy, of which the people of the district still talk with bated breath. At the outset it may perhaps be as well to give the facts of the case as set forth in the *Norwich Mercury* of March 29, 1794. A paragraph in that issue is as follows :

"At the Suffolk Assizes, held at Bury, before Judge Ashurst, and which ended on Tuesday last, John and Nathan Nichols, for the inhuman murder of Sarah Nichols (daughter of the former and sister of the latter) received sentence of death and were executed at Bury on Wednesday last ; the father was afterwards hung in chains near the spot (between Honington and Fakenham in that county) where the murder was committed ; the body of the son was delivered to the surgeons for dissection. Two of Nichols' daughters, one a married woman, the other only 12 years of age, gave evidence against their unnatural father, whose monstrous depravity, the Judge observed, in instigating one of his own children to murder another, exceeded anything he had ever before met with. The father and brother waylaid the hapless girl in the evening of the 14th September

last ; the former drew a stake out of a hedge and giving it to his son urged him with threats to commit the horrid deed ; whereupon the boy, striking his sister on the head, knocked her down and repeated his blows till he had deprived her of life ; he afterwards, at his father's desire, went and tied one of her garters round her neck and dragged her into a ditch, where she was found the next morning. Nathan Nichols was 19 and Sarah Nichols 17 years of age."

A further paragraph, as follows, appeared in the *Norwich Mercury* of April 5 :

"John and Nathan Nichols, executed at Bury last week, both asserted their innocence, when arrived at the gallows, and notwithstanding the very ample confession of the boy, he then said that his father was innocent, for all he knew, of the act for which they were about to suffer. The behaviour of the elder Nichols was very undaunted, as he gave away his hat and neckcloth to some persons standing in the crowd, with apparent unconcern ; and on ascending the ladder, addressed himself to the spectators, saying—'Life is but a short passage, and now I am at the last step ; of the crime for which I am going to suffer I am entirely innocent.' John Nichols was 59 years of age. They were carpenters by trade."

These are the facts so far as they were ascertainable, as set forth by a contemporary writer. Local tradition has preserved other details and added some which are obviously incorrect. Nichols is said to have been twice married, and the second wife did not get on with the daughter of the first marriage, but this is contrary to the facts. He is also stated to have urged his son to kill the girl at the top of the hill going to Honington in a covert called "Taylor's Grove," which then reached to that spot. The girl had been sent to buy provisions at Honington, and the brother was given a silver watch by his father for committing the crime. After execution the boy was boiled, presumably for the skeleton ; the

father was gibbeted at a place still called "Gibbet Covert," a mile south of the church. In time the body is said to have fallen to pieces, and to have been buried in a claypit at Willow Hall, a little way off. Part of the gibbet was made into a bridge over a dyke at Honington. So says tradition. In the Fakenham register is the following entry—"Sarah Nicholds, daughter of John Nickolds, who was murdered, was buried September ye 15th, 1793," and her grave is said to be just within the churchyard gates. To show how facts may be handed down, the present rector of Fakenham was informed by an old man named William Lillingstone, that his grandfather was driving the "parson of Fakenham" to take duty at Sapiston, when the body of the girl, said to have been discovered by a gamekeeper's dog, was being carried home. Nickolds, or Nichols, lived in the last cottage in the village towards Honington, an old clay-lump house still standing.

Some years after the execution, local tradition states that a party of rustics was assembled one night in Honington "Fox" and the conversation at length drifted to the crime. One man laid another a wager that he dare not go and ask the corpse on the Gibbet how it felt. The wager was accepted, and after a lonely walk across the heath to the music of the creaking gibbet-chains the corpse loomed above him in the darkness. "Well, Naabour Nichols, how d'you fale?" was the query, and great was his consternation when a gruff voice answered, "Wet, cold and hungry, and tired of being here." The man who had laid the wager had taken a short cut across the fields, climbed the gibbet, and acted as spokesman. Unfortunately for the accuracy of this tale, which is

told with a wealth of local detail, the same incident is narrated, according to "Folk-Lore," of gibbets in various parts of England, including one in Shropshire, and that of the malefactor Price, who was executed near Leeds. It is apparently a localized account of a widespread tradition, and the Fakenham gibbet cannot claim to have any exclusive rights concerning it.

In his village drama "Hazelwood Hall," Robert Bloomfield makes Jack Whirlwind, one of his characters, say "I ran my gig against a post upon the common," and Captain Goldhawk replies, "I don't recollect any post on the common, but a stump of the old gibbet." This was written in 1823, and it is not improbable that Bloomfield had in mind the gibbet on Fakenham Heath.

Fakenham is also closely associated with Bloomfield's ancestry. His grandfather was set up in a drapery shop here, and the house furnished by his wife's relations, but so fond of reading was he that he neglected the business to such a degree that his father refused him further aid, and the son changed the spelling of his name from Blomfield to Bloomfield. His son George married Miss Elizabeth Manby, the daughter of a Fakenham farmer, and their youngest boy was Robert. The father died of smallpox, and was buried at midnight; there is a graphic description of this in "Good Tidings." The mother then established a dame school in a cottage which had been given her by her father when she married, and taught her own children with others. This, however, was in the adjoining parish of Honington, about 2 miles from Fakenham, and Robert Bloomfield's birth-place. The cottage, of clay lump, with brick additions, the floor of the bedrooms little below the spring of the

roof, is in a ruinous condition, and stands behind the blacksmith's shop. In addition to tuition from his mother, Robert received instruction from a Mr. Rodwell, of Ixworth, but at the age of eleven started life in grim earnest, on the farm of Mr. W. Austin, of Sapiston, a village adjoining Honington. Here he lived in the house, as was then customary, and did agricultural work, his experiences being faithfully pictured in his long poem "The Farmer's Boy," while the life of the countryside formed the basis of many others. In his old age, in 1804 in fact, Bloomfield purchased the freehold of his old home, but when pressed by debt and loss of income was compelled to sell it for £105. From this, however, neither the poet nor his family received any benefit, for owing to a dispute as to the validity of the title all the money went in legal expenses.



DEVIL'S DYKE, WEETING



BARNHAM CROSS, BASE

CHAPTER XI

Traditions, Customs and Ghost Tales

A PART from the legends of the Swaffham Pedlar and the Babes in the Wood, which are too well-known to need repetition, there are traditions associated with many of the archæological remains of the district. To Tutt's Hill, a Bronze Age barrow on the brow of the ridge between Thetford and Euston, belongs a tradition which appears to be a localized form of a not uncommon legend, which has its Norfolk counterpart in the "Traitor-Monk of St. Benet's Abbey." On one of the occasions when the Danes attacked Thetford they are said to have been unable to find a weak link in the chain of Saxon defences. Several Saxons who were captured refused, even when tortured, to give information as to any unprepared part of the town fortifications, until a shepherd named Tutt told of a way over the marshes to the westward, and an easy ford across the river, which would bring the Danes in on the side of the town where there were no earthworks. Tutt, who had previously asked for a reward, was told that it should be "beyond his highest expectations." It was ; for after the town was captured, he is said to have been hanged on what has since been known as Tutt's Hill. There are also tradi-

tions that in one of the barrows at Weeting, a man was buried in an upright position, and that there is a tunnel under the fens from Lakenheath to Ely, that it has oak sides and roof and was used in the time of Hereward.

At two of the places where the Icknield Way was crossed by other roads suicides appear to have been buried. The tradition connected with Marmansgrave, Elveden, is that Mar was a gamekeeper, who when found off his beat by poachers was shot in accordance with their previous threats. In a case before the Court of Augmentation in the sixteenth century references to "Deadman's Grave" and "Deadman's Lands" appear to refer to this locality. Chunk Harvey's Grave is in Thetford where the old road from Thetford to Euston crossed the Icknield Way. It is said that Chunk Harvey was a pirate who was betrayed by a former comrade, executed, and buried here. A century ago a tree still standing, was reputed to have grown from the stake with which his body was pierced.

Associated with the mediæval cross by the Pilgrims' Way on Mount Ephraim, Weeting, is a local tradition that people used to assemble there for religious services, and with the great boulder at Merton a belief that if it were removed "the waters would rise and cover the whole earth."

Thetford Castle Hill is said to have been formed by the devil scraping his boot after he had made the Fendyke at Weeting by dragging his foot along the ground. A hollow north-east of the northern rampart and containing water is known as "Devil's Hole" and it is said that anyone walking round it seven times at midnight will see the owner. On Carr Common there was also a

pool—now filled in—known as Devil's Hole or Frenchman's Hole, the latter from a tradition that a Frenchman committed suicide therein. Some of the natives assert that the Castle Hill was thrown up by Oliver Cromwell, but notwithstanding this there is a general belief that when the Priory was destroyed, six silver bells were taken from the church and buried beneath the Hill. A tale as to the burial of three silver bells is also associated with Santon. The most circumstantial tradition connected with the Castle Hill is that there was formerly on the site a splendid castle, in which the hoarded treasures of a powerful monarch rested in peace and security. There came a time at length when an enemy landed on this isle of ours, and the king was sore vexed in his mind as to the manner in which he could best preserve his wealth, for the cares of riches pressed heavily upon him. At last he determined to hide the Castle as well as the treasure. Assembling, therefore, his mighty men of valour, he bade them fetch earth, and gradually the castle was blotted out from the gaze of man with the mound which we see to-day.

In 1909 an aged inhabitant of Thompson, standing by Thompson Water, which he had helped to construct, told me that: "In old days Thetford used to come almost up to here. It did come to Stanford and Stanford Church was in Thetford. Half a mile from Stanford 'Cock' on the way to Thetford is a pit and there a desperate battle was fought in the English war against the Danes." This information is interesting, not because it is true—there is a similar story concerning Troston and both are unreliable—but because it indicates how deeply the importance of Thetford from early times to the Middle Ages

entered into the popular imagination, and has been preserved in local folk-memory. A similar idea is associated with the belief that the street of the goldsmiths was formerly on Barnham Common.

The red-brick gateway which marked the entrance to the Place Farm or Nunnery at Thetford, is blocked by a wall and it is stated that this was built up seven times, and knocked down seven times by a carriage with four horses. A better authenticated account of a curious happening in the residence at the Nunnery is thus told. Young Lord Dacre was staying with his guardian, Sir Richard Fulmerston, and was killed by shattering his head on the wall, through a fall from a rocking horse. The blood stains were shown over 100 years later, but tradition has cast an unnecessary sully on the name of a pious man, by surmising that the rocking horse had been purposely rendered insecure by order of his guardian. The ghost of Lord Dacre is said to prance up and down on the ghost of a headless rocking horse. Lord Dacre's phantom got so troublesome around the "Blue Bridges"—now the Nun's Bridges—that it was determined to lay it. Doubtless amid the plaudits of the assembled populace a pound of new candles was thrown into the Little Ouse and the spirit was ordered not to return until they were burned completely up.

Many persons in Thetford firmly believe that there is a haunted room in the King's House in which there is the skeleton of a man who was murdered, still sitting at a table with a parchment deed in front of him, the belief being that the doors and windows were walled up and the room allowed to remain. The pedestal of the boundary cross on Barnham Common is hollow and sometimes

contains water; it is therefore stated that there was once a plague in Thetford and travellers to and from the town had to wash their money in this basin. Bride's Pit at Swaffham is a pond into which it is said that a bride and bridegroom drove on their return from the wedding festivities, the former being drowned.

Perhaps some ancient tribal difference is indicated by the belief that a native of Brandon could always be known by his brilliantly-coloured attire, and a native of Thetford because he walked in the middle of the road, as the paths were made of cobble-stones. In some of these cases it is probable that the local tradition embodies a perverted version of some actual occurrence in the inarticulate centuries of the past. This is the more probable because of the almost entire absence of migration from many villages, and the verbal communication from generation to generation of local happenings.

Some of the local customs have their roots deep in the past. This is certainly the case with one at Wretham which has its counterpart in corn-spirits all over the world. "When the harvest work was finished by the tenants, they were to have half an acre of barley, and a ram let loose in the midst of them, and if they caught him he was their own to make merry with; but if he escaped from them he was the lord's."

On May-day the children of Brandon decorate themselves with garlands and go round in companies, singing at the houses of the chief residents; and on Shrove Tuesday, the boys of Thetford Grammar School have a half holiday, probably a survival of the time when cock-shying was the recognized pastime. "Hummy dancers" are associated with Thetford and Boxing Day.

Until about twenty years ago, and on a few occasions since, bands of young men dressed in absurd costumes and with blacked faces, paraded the streets and at intervals gave a performance. Some of each party wore female costumes and these were chased round and round by their partners, who struck their padded backs with wooden ladles. These resounding thwacks were accompanied by the yells of both strikers and stricken. The band usually consisted of a man who played on fire-irons, another on a frying-pan, sometimes a performer on a concertina, and generally two or three with home-made stringed instruments from which a humming sound was evoked, possibly the origin of the term "Hummy-dancers." As the price of this travesty of the drama, offerings were solicited from passers-by, and from the residents in the vicinity of the various "stands," and by the end of the day most of the performers had imbibed their share of the proceeds. It is probable that this absurd performance was a degenerate mystery play, and judging by the actions of the performers not unlikely that of "St. George and the Dragon." For many years the Thetford musicians and actors were of high repute. Both Evelyn and Pepys mentioned the Thetford fiddlers, and Shadwell in his play "Bury Fair" referred to the "Thetford Musick." Sir Humphrey Noddy said: "Shud, they are the best music in England; there's the best Shawm and Bandore, and a fellow that acts Tom of Bet'lem to a miracle! and they sing 'Charon, oh gentle Charon,' and 'Come Daphne' better than Singleton and Clayton did."

At Wretham traditions of witchcraft still persist. In one case the only reliable test was tried. The woman was thrown into the mere to see if she would float or

sink. As she did the former, her guilt was held to be established with certainty. Another woman was so certainly a witch that the responsibility was always held to be hers whenever any stock in the village was ill. Culminating proof came the day before her death, when the whole brood of goslings belonging to a neighbour ran into the fireplace and was burned to death. "White witches" who still exist in many villages, are able to "bless" scalds and burns. They make passes over them, utter mysterious incantations, the patient preserving absolute silence, not venturing even to offer thanks—except in kind.

So recently as 1892 when a Brandon woman was missing and it was feared that she was drowned, the Thetford Navigation Superintendent rowed down the Little Ouse accompanied by a policeman mildly and slowly beating a big drum. It was alleged that if they came to any part of the river in which there was a dead body, a difference in the sound of the drum would be distinctly noticed. Readers of *Tom Sawyer* will remember that when he and two companions started in the pirate profession, their relatives feared that they were drowned, and a drum was beaten in a boat on the river to bring the bodies to the surface.

Villagers near the upper Little Ouse believe that "if you catch a running toad (natterjack) and put it in an ant's nest until the flesh is all gone, and then put the bones in a running stream, one of them will stand upright. Take this out and with it you can do what you like—make yourself into a witch or a wizard or anything of that kind." Folk-medicine also includes the belief that if a piece of fat is stolen, used to rub a wart, and then

buried, as the fat wastes away, so will the wart. Many persons are supposed to have the gift of charming away warts. One man sold his warts to a "charmer" for a farthing; another counted his eighty-four at intervals until they vanished; and others have simply been informed that the warts would go, and they have gone. A cure for hiccough is to put a forefinger in each ear and drink from a glass of water, and for chilblains to run barefoot in the snow.

There are many superstitions recognized by the majority of people, whether or no they believe in them. Of such kind is the belief that the horseshoe brings luck, and many and many a door can be seen crowned with a guardian spirit of old iron. A most unlucky thing to do is to spill salt, but the effect can be neutralized by taking a pinch of that which has fallen and throwing it over the left shoulder. A long stalk in the teacup denotes a long stranger, and a short stalk a stranger of small stature. Smuts on the bar of a stove denote the same, and the harder it is to blow them off the greater stranger will the visitor be. It is also generally believed that anyone taking robins' eggs will break a limb. A dog's howling is held to foreshadow ill-luck, and if anyone dies soon after, to have foretold death. If the right ear of any person burns, some one is talking well of him; but if the left ear, some one is talking ill. By blowing on the tuft of a seeding dandelion, one can tell how many years will elapse before one's marriage by the number of puffs taken to blow it all away, and the time of day can be told by the same method, for which reason it is often called the "Shepherd's Clock." It is a harbinger of luck to see the moon over the left shoulder, and on first seeing

the new moon, to turn over the money in one's pockets. To break a looking-glass is also an extremely unlucky event. Another superstition is that when pieces of coal fly out of the grate, if they are long they betoken a death in the family within the year. If they are square in shape like a money-box, money will be left to some one in the family within the year. There is a widespread belief that the gift of any cutting instrument must be paid for by the recipient, even if it be only with the smallest coin of the realm. The explanation given is that otherwise it "might cut their love." Fossil sea-urchins known as "fairy-loaves" are common ornaments on mantel-shelves and are believed to bring luck, while belemnites are commonly known as "thunderbolts." Many people spit on milestones "for luck." Another widely held belief is that if a human tooth be thrown away and any animal gnaws it or eats it, any new tooth would be like that of the animal which had bitten the old one.

Some of the local ghost-stories are probably due to the belief formerly held that the only cure for a smoky chimney was to tie a pig's bladder to the end of a piece of string and let the draught keep it up the chimney. In a high wind the bladder would tap first on one side of the chimney and then on the other, and people were thus frightened who went into new houses and did not know of the existence of these uncanny spirits.

Many years ago a spectre known as "The White Rabbit" haunted parts of Thetford near the Warren. It had large flaming eyes, could run very fast, was never caught, and was seen by a great many people. The superstition is probably identical with that of "Black Shuck" which

was a dog that trotted noiselessly along the hedgerows, with one blazing eye in the middle of its forehead. This legend was brought over by our Scandinavian forefathers, and the animal was by them supposed to be the black hound of Odin. Both at Thetford and at Egloshayle in Cornwall the hound seems to have been changed into a rabbit.

One spectre is said to haunt the road between Threxton and Saham Toney. It consists of a carriage noiselessly drawn by four headless horses, with several headless persons seated on the box. It may be correct to state, as is asserted, that those who have seen it have recognized in these headless beings the forms of certain of their deceased friends. On various occasions the headless ghost of the Archdeacon of Sudbury, who was beheaded near Temple Bridge, Icklingham, and his body left lying in the fields for some time, nobody daring to remove it for burial, is reported to have been seen in the vicinity.

Of the many local ghost-stories it is only possible to record two. One is associated with Santon church. It is said that a man who was working in the harvest field suffered from extreme heat and expressed his intention of going to St. Helen's Well to get some water to drink. His companions endeavoured to dissuade him from drinking icy-cold water in his heated condition, but he was obstinate, went to the spring and drank till he died. His spirit thereupon haunted the pit in which the spring was situated. Some years afterwards a Santon labourer was in Thetford, and after a long call at the "Half Moon"—a public house pulled down many years ago—he returned to Santon, and passing by St. Helen's Well thought he saw another kind of spirit. He ran as well

and as fast as he could until he came to Santon Church, where a harbour of refuge presented itself. At that time the church was in very bad repair, and there was a hole in the wall big enough for a man to crawl through. Into this he went and sheltering in the pitch dark interior, began to hear spirits moving. Then one brushed up against him, and the bell started to toll his death knell. He spent the remainder of the night in abject fear, was found in a semi-conscious condition in the morning, and it was weeks before he recovered from his fright. The explanation was simple. Some sheep had crawled into the church by the same hole through which he obtained entrance, and these represented the spirits, whilst the tolling of the bell was caused by one of them becoming entangled in the bell rope.

Another story is that very many years ago some poachers killed a gamekeeper near Croxton, and not knowing what to do with him, put him in their cart amongst the rabbits and hares. When they came near Thetford, a pit near the road (known then as Chalk Pit Head) seemed to offer a convenient site for depositing his dead body. As they were lifting him out of the cart he in part recovered, and swore to haunt them all their lives; but they soon killed him without doubt and buried him. Ever after the strange sight might be seen of a hearse, coffin, and bearers coming out of the pit at dead of night, and, after going some little distance down the road, turning in at a field-gate.

Among the dialect words in use in the heart of the district are "morkin" for scarecrow; "four-leet" for crossways; "horse-flies" for dragon-flies; "dag" for dew; "annick," to play; "ungain," unsteady; "on

the sosh," slanting ; " shack," a trot or slow run ; " shirk-shacks," Methodists ; " smirr " for drizzle ; " raughty " for cold misty weather ; " foysty " for musty and mildewed ; " tipe," a pitfall for rabbits ; " hulk," to disembowel rabbits ; " shrog," a rabbit with long hair, probably diseased ; " net-rein," sand-sedge ; " clung," a shrivelled fruit ; " pipy," celery or lettuce that is sprouting again at the heart ; " huddle," to split the sinews in a rabbit's hind leg and push the other leg through ; " golts," pipes of sand in the clay ; " sase," a layer of flint in the chalk ; " rhizzes," hazel branches used in building wattle-and-daub houses (Anglo-Saxon " hris," tops of trees) ; " dead-lime," disturbed chalk ; " tweet burning," burning of twitch or quicks ; " broaches," cleft larch or hazel boughs ; " lanner," piece of cord on end of a whip ; " in the main," undercooked meat ; " guler," yellow bunting ; " hodamadod," snail ; " ding," a blow ; " drift," a farm occupation road ; " fleet," shallow ; " frail," a basket made of plaited rushes ; " keeler," a tub chiefly used for brewing, or scalding pigs ; " pulk-hole," a small pond ; " sight," a good deal ; " skep," a basket for measuring ; " puggy's nest," a squirrel's drey ; " midsummer-dores," cock-chafers ; " soldier," red admiral butterfly ; " skaters," several species of water-beetle ; " glade," eel-pick ; " dagging," eel-picking ; " sprit," quant ; " pit," mere ; " drain," dyke ; " crome-stick," stick with curved handle ; " stroam about," to wander ; " chovy," a beetle, usually very abundant in May, used as a bait for fishing ; " that's his native," place being understood ; " lig," carry or drag ; " brig," a bridge ; " hards," sandbanks in the river ; " lam," to kick ; " loping," striding ;

“long dog,” a greyhound ; and “hutkin,” a finger-stall. An advertisement of 1728 states that “Two pairs of Tumpokes will be fought for 8 guineas at the Fleece in Thetford.”

CHAPTER XII

Prehistoric Times

FEW districts in Europe have more attractions to the archæologist than Breckland. The Palæolithic flint implements found in its gravels and brickearths; the Neolithic flint implements scattered by the million over the surface of its heaths and arable fields; its important flint-mines at Grime's Graves; its lengthy mileage of primitive trackways; its dykes, many barrows, and the numerous relics of early cultures which are constantly being discovered, indicate that in most of the prehistoric periods it was one of the most important centres of culture in the British Isles.

Since 1862, when the first Palæolithic implement was found in gravel in the valley of the Little Ouse, many thousands of hand-axes and ovates have been discovered—chiefly in the valleys of the Little Ouse, Thet and Lark—and most museums contain specimens from this district. Both of the important cultures of the "Drift" period are fully represented. Hand-axes of the Chelles period have been found, sometimes in great abundance, at Brettenham, and Rushford (Snarehill) in the Thet valley; at Barnham, Thetford, Weeting, Brandon, Hockwold, Wilton, Feltwell, Lakenheath and Wangford



BRECKLAND NEOLITHIC IMPLEMENTS

in the Little Ouse valley ; and at Flempton, West Stow, Cavenham, Icklingham, Little Barton, and Eriswell in the Lark Valley. Ovates or finely-chipped hand-axes of the St. Acheul period have been found at Mundford and Cranwich in the Wissey valley ; at Brettenham and Rushford (Snarehill) in the Thet valley ; at Great Fakenham, Thetford, Santon Downham, Weeting, Brandon and Wilton in the Little Ouse valley ; and at Mildenhall in the Lark valley. Implements of this period have also been found in the brickearths at Barnham, Culford and Elveden on the plateau between the valleys of the Little Ouse and Lark, and at Botany Bay, Weeting.

In postulating the conditions which must have accompanied the deposition of the implementiferous gravels, the late Dr. W. Allen Sturge said : " Drift implements are found in gravels which have been formed at one or more epochs of vast diluvial action, by which stones lying on the surface of the land have been washed down to form deposits of gravel in valleys, which valleys may still exist as such, or may by subsequent changes of the surface have ceased to be valleys, may indeed be converted into hilltops. Where the ground was not cleared by the floods we should find implements of this period on or near the surface independently of gravels. Since the close of the Drift period, floods on the scale necessary for such complete sweeping of the surface seem not to have taken place."

The crucial question then arises as to the period or periods when this sweeping bare of the entire land-surface took place, and this narrows itself to the problem whether it was immediately pre- or post-glacial, or whether it was inter-glacial, as we know of nothing in the Pleistocene

period other than the melting of vast quantities of ice which could have removed practically every flint implement from hundreds of square miles of land-surface. On the evidence of the fossil mammalia, chiefly voles and lemmings, Mr. Martin A. C. Hinton worked out the succession of the Pleistocene deposits in England, and Mr. A. S. Kennard, the fossil mollusca, and both agree that the implementiferous gravels are part of an unbroken series between the Norwich Crag and the oldest glacial deposits, and that there is no trace in the fauna of a cold climate until after the deposition of the gravels.

All the gravels in this district rest on chalk and are usually capped by sand. The gathering-ground of the streams is totally inadequate to account for the vast terraces of gravel alongside their valleys, or the deposit of gravels containing implements at a height of 90 feet above the present Little Ouse. Though no glacial deposit is now found above these gravel terraces, it is possible that the sand itself may provide a clue, for if the same conditions obtain as at Grime's Graves, then the sand itself is decalcified boulder-clay, and there is definite proof that the gravels and their contained implements are at least older than that stage of the glacial period during which the chalky boulder clay was deposited.

Of the four Palæolithic "cave" periods, the oldest, that of Le Moustier, is represented by one of the best-known British stations, that at High Lodge, Mildenhall. In a brickearth, which after deposition was covered by a gravel in which are hand-axes of Chelles date and ovates of the St. Acheul period, numerous flakes and implements which can certainly be referred to the Le Moustier period have occurred. Side-scrapers, end-scrapers and points

are the most common types. Although some of the surface implements are not unlike Aurignac types, they cannot be referred with any certainty to this period, and the only definitely Solutr  implement is a shouldered point which I obtained from brickearth at Barnham. Implements of La Madeleine period from a site on Wretham Heath have been described by Dr. J. E. Marr. Isolated pygmy implements have been found in several parishes and there is a definite station at Wangford. These probably date from the transitional period between La Madeleine and the true Neolithic.

For most of the implements before the Neolithic period one is dependent on casual pits in the gravel and brick-earth and the extent to which they are being worked. Neolithic implements on the other hand may be found on the surface of heaths (where rabbits and moles turn them out), brecks, and arable fields, sometimes in almost bewildering profusion. I have found them in every parish in Breckland, but they are much more numerous in some than in others. Among the parishes where they have occurred in great abundance are Beechamwell, Cranwich, Hockham, Methwold, Mundford, Northwold, Rushford, Santon, Thetford and Weeting in Norfolk; and Barnham, Cavenham, Eriswell, Fakenham, Icklingham, Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Santon Downham and Wangford in Suffolk. Yet it must not be assumed that implements occur in all parts of these parishes. Stations are usually limited in area, and even where there are hundreds of thousands of flint flakes and chips which demonstrate that the place was a workshop-site of prehistoric man, the number of well-chipped perfect implements is but a small proportion of the humanly-worked

flints. Even on arable sites that are well-known as settlements the condition of the soil is an important factor in the discovery of implements. When newly ploughed the flints are hidden in the loose sand, and it is only after rains have consolidated the soil that there is any real opportunity of a search being rewarded with success.

To the Tardenois culture which marked (with that of Mas D'Azil) the merging of the Late Palæolithic period into the Neolithic, it seems probable that stations at Hockham (on the eastern border of the ancient mere), Two-mile-bottom, Thetford, and Wangford (where the implements are all of the pygmy type) can be referred. Of the ordinary chipped implements of the Neolithic period the most abundant are scrapers of various kinds, which occur on all sites, though on one button-scrapers may be dominant, on another end-scrapers and on another scrapers of horse-shoe shape. Axes are by no means common, though some remarkably fine specimens have been found. Cones are extremely local in their distribution, while hollow-scrapers, though not really abundant, occur on all sites and are noted for the perfection of chipping displayed in making the hollows. Chisels, fabricators, knives with a great diversity of form and chipping, and pounders or hammerstones are found on most Neolithic stations. The most attractive feature of the implements of Breckland is the beauty of material and chipping of many of the smaller types of implements—leaf-shaped and barbed arrowheads, awls and borers, graters, harpoon-barbs, triangular knives, saws, and even some of the button-scrapers. In some of the finest examples the flint is translucent and butter-scotch in

colour. No source of the raw material is known and it is possible their appearance is due to chemical changes subsequent to manufacture. Excellent imitations of some of these prehistoric flint implements are made by the Brandon flint-knappers, and only a comparison of a modern and a Neolithic flint saw is needed to show the consummate skill of the prehistoric flint-worker. Some of these implements have a lustrous surface, probably caused by blowing sand before exposure had resulted in any patination, while others show the various changes of patina which occur in the transformation of the outer layer of the flint from black to white.

Associated with the flint-mining industry of the Neolithic period is apparently a special culture with its peculiar forms of flint implements designated the "Cissbury type" from their association with the flint-mines at Cissbury in Sussex. Implements of this type have been found at Beechamwell, Bodney, Buckenham Tofts, Cranwich, Hilborough, Ickburgh, Methwold, Mundford, Northwold, Rushford, Santon, West Tofts, Weeting and Wilton in Norfolk; and Cavenham, Elveden and Icklingham in Suffolk, but with the exception of one shaft at Buckenham Tofts the flint-mines associated with the industry have only been excavated at Grime's Graves, Weeting, which has been proved to be one of the most important prehistoric sites in the British Isles. Canon Greenwell partially excavated one shaft in 1870, and two were cleared by the "Prehistoric Society of East Anglia" in 1914, and members of the Society have conducted excavations on the site almost every year since. As a result our knowledge of no other prehistoric mining site in the country is so great as that concerning

Grime's Graves. The oldest shafts discovered are roughly circular in shape, sunk through boulder clay and chalk to a depth of about 13 feet, where the layer of fine flint known as the "floorstone" was reached. These shafts are devoid of galleries, but are belled out at the base. The mining picks were formed of the long bones of animals, with wedges and choppers of flint.

The two shafts excavated in 1914 evidenced a much more advanced type of mining. In order to reach the much-prized layer of floorstone it was necessary to sink the shafts through sand, chalky boulder clay and chalk to a depth of 30 feet, and then tunnel in the chalk in all directions in order to obtain the flint. The shafts were roughly circular at the mouth, one with a diameter of 42 feet, and the other of 30, funnel-shaped in the soft layers and vertical in the chalk. From the base of each shaft there were eight galleries, which led into those of other shafts, so that it is evident that there is a perfect maze of tunnels about 30 feet from the surface over most of the area of the Graves. The flint which originally formed the floors of the galleries was removed and utilized, but the chalk taken from one gallery was piled up in others that were disused, and when one shaft ceased to be worked, it was filled with material taken from other shafts that were dug near by. The process of filling in does not appear to have been continuous, and the presence of fireplaces with burnt flints and bones and charcoal at various levels in the shafts shows that when partially filled these were used for temporary habitation.

Flint axes of remarkable type came from the galleries, and the presence of thong marks on the chalk walls of the shafts indicated the method by which the flint, and

possibly the miners themselves, reached the surface. The commonest miner's tool was the pick made from an antler of the red deer. The crown of the antler and the second and third tines were removed, in a few cases by cutting, but usually by fire; the beam was then used as a handle and the brow tine as the pick. When this became broken or blunted the tool was discarded and in the two pits excavated some 244 of these antler-picks were discovered. In many cases the handles of the picks were worn smooth by the hands of the miners, and in a few instances the finger-prints of the original users were vividly impressed in the chalk with which some of the picks were covered. As is but natural in a settlement which apparently originated from the presence of excellent flint, implements of that material are the most numerous of the objects found during the excavations, not only in the shafts and galleries, but in many "floors" a few feet from the surface which have been explored. Although most of these types have been found associated with the flint-mining industry either in this country or on the Continent, they have not been found at other stations of the Neolithic Age. It is possible, as I do, to look on these implements as representing a homogeneous flint-mining culture of the Neolithic Age, or to assert, as do some excellent authorities, that at least some portion of the industry here represented is contemporary with the Palæolithic "cave" periods of Le Moustier and Aurignac.

The fauna and flora furnish the strongest support for the view that this is a Neolithic mining industry. When the flint-mines were worked it appears that the district consisted of open woodlands, the chief trees being Scotch pine, beech, and poorly-grown oak, though yew, spruce

and sallow also occurred. From the bones and teeth, it is possible to say that the beaver made dams in the neighbouring river-valley; that red and roe deer dwelt in the woodlands; that dogs and foxes lived in the district; and that horses, oxen, sheep and swine, either wild or semi-domesticated, formed part of the food of the miners. Of the smaller animals of which the skeletons were found, the common shrew, common mole, rabbit, long-tailed field mouse, field vole and bank vole were represented, but the most abundant remains were those of bats, of which four species—Daubenton's, Natterer's, Bechstein's and the Whiskered Bat—were found in the galleries, which formed a highly desirable roosting-place. The thousands of shells of molluscs formed part of a woodland group requiring shade and moisture.

Apart from the evidence derived from the mining-shafts, many parts of the area—which probably includes about 400 pits—are occupied by working and habitation floors, from a few inches to a few feet below the present surface. Fourteen of these were excavated at the same time as the shaft and yielded not only some of the finest implements, but also pottery and mammalian bones. Some of these floors, and the tumulus on the east side of the area, undoubtedly belong to the Bronze Age, and others to the Early Iron Age. From one of the latter, pottery of eleven different wares was obtained, as well as animal bones, pot-boilers, worked flints of all periods, bone tools, shells, carved chalk, chalk balls, and perforated objects of chalk resembling loom-weights. Some of the pottery belonged to the Halstatt period. Various floors have yielded a socketed bronze celt, bronze tweezers and a bronze spearhead of the Bronze Age. In 1920

Mr. A. Leslie Armstrong found some fine engravings incised on flint crust on a floor immediately west of the tumulus pit. One of them is an excellent representation of an elk or stag feeding, and another of an animal's head, perhaps a hind. The Grime's Graves area is now scheduled as a National Monument, so that the evidence from one of the most remarkable prehistoric sites in Europe will not be heedlessly destroyed.

Apparently towards the end of the Neolithic period and overlapping into the Bronze Age, implements of flint and stone were wholly or partly polished. These have been found in twenty-four of the Norfolk parishes, and fourteen of the Suffolk. For polished axes the favoured material was the hard grey flint from Lincolnshire, found in the chalky boulder clay of the district and brought thither by glacial action. The proportion of polished implements to chipped is, however, extremely small, and they are more often found isolated than associated with chipped implements.

Implements of the Bronze Age have been discovered in thirteen of the parishes in the Norfolk part of Breckland, and in eleven of the parishes in the Suffolk part. Evidence of the Neolithic population is chiefly found on the heaths and warrens, but in the Bronze Age these were not so thickly inhabited, and settlements were more abundant in the valleys of the fens. Dr. Cyril Fox concludes that only two culture phases are represented, one beginning about 2000 B.C. and the other lasting about 500 years, influenced by the Halstatt culture and replaced either by that or by the later La Tene civilization about 500-400 B.C. Bronze Age barrows, all bowl-shaped, are confined almost entirely to the uplands.

Barrow-burial in this district probably ceased about 1000 B.C.

Barrows are more numerous in Breckland than in any other district of like extent in East Anglia. In the Norfolk portion there are at least forty-five, and in the Suffolk portion at least twenty-nine. Some of these are named. Thus we have "Hangour Hill" at Beechamwell, "Man Hill" at Bodney, "Mickle Hill" at Croxton, "Soldier's Hill" at Garboldisham, "Sparrow Hills" at Merton, "Tut Hill," "Seven Hills" and "Elder Hill" at Rushford, "Blood Hill" at Santon, "Gallows Hill" at Thetford, "Mill Hill" at Tottington, "Pepper Hill" at Weeting, "Hill of Health" at Culford, "How Hill" at Eriswell, "Deadman's Grave" at Icklingham, "Seven Hills" at Ingham, "Hut Hill" at Knettishall, "Cuckoo Hill" at Lackford, "Maid's Cross Hill" at Lakenheath, "Jennet's Hill" at West Stow, and "Traveller's Hill" at Wordwell. In addition to these there are unnamed barrows at Bodney, Cockley Cley, East Harling, Garboldisham, Methwold, Mundford, Northwold, North Pickenham (3), Thompson, Tottington (2), Weeting (5), and West Harling (2), in Norfolk; and at Barnham, Cavenham, Euston (3), Hempton, Icklingham (5), Knettishall, Little Barton (2), Mildenhall (2), Santon Downham, and West Stow, in Suffolk. Perhaps the most remarkable of the barrows which have been excavated was one at Barnham carefully examined by Mrs. R. B. Caton. It contained at least ten Bronze Age urns, one of the Early Iron Age and one of the first century, A.D. There was an abundance of charcoal, many bones, human and otherwise, and an Anglo-Saxon iron sword, knife, spear-head and part of a shield. In the soil of which the

barrow was made were 1,160 flint flakes and 240 flint implements. These had evidently been collected from the surface of the surrounding district, and were presumably placed on the funeral pyre by the mourners. The abundance of flint flakes has also been noticed on other barrows in the district, particularly at Weeting, Santon Downham and West Harling.

Apart from coins, the remains of the Early Iron Age are surprisingly scanty. Pottery has been found on several "floors" associated with pot-boilers, charcoal and mammalian bones, and urns and other relics have been noted in four of the Norfolk parishes and eight of the Suffolk. Evidence of settlements in the Romano-British period are more numerous, for they have been recorded from twenty-three Norfolk and eleven Suffolk parishes. In the abundance of its Palæolithic and Neolithic implements, and in the number of its existing Bronze Age barrows, the district has few equals; while in Grime's Graves it has a prehistoric flint-mining site of national importance.

CHAPTER XIII

The Breckland Villages

THE geological features which are so largely responsible for the peculiarities of the district affect, as I have shown, the building materials and therefore the aspect of the villages. Their influence is indicated in other ways—in the great chalk-pits at Thetford, Methwold, Northwood, Lakenheath, East Harling and Hockwold; in the numerous marlpits with which clay or chalk was obtained for marling the land; and in the boulders obtained from the chalky boulder clay which protect so many corners and gateways. The largest of these boulders is the noted one at Merton, which is in a pit dug for marl, but now almost full of water. The boulder is of Neocomian sandstone with a measurement of 12 by 5 feet for the top surface and a depth of about 5 feet. Where hawthorn hedges have been planted they have in many cases been allowed to run wild, and no other part of East Anglia has so many between 15 and 20 feet in height. The treeless nature of the district until the eighteenth century has been changed to a considerable extent by planting, but there are few avenues of trees, though those in Kilverstone Lane and Shadwell Lane are remarkable for their beauty, while



GREAT CRESSINGHAM MANOR HOUSE



WARREN LODGE, THETFORD

Crabapple Row at Rushford, a half-mile length of road with tall crab-apple trees on each side is a vision of delight at blossoming-time.

Many of these parishes are remarkable for the continuity of early cultural periods. Taking these as Chelles and St. Acheul for the Palæolithic "drift" period; Neolithic chipped and polished; Bronze Age; Late-Keltic period; Romano-British, Saxon and Norman, we have nine periods of culture representing much the greater part of the history of mankind. All these periods are represented by finds and remains at Thetford. At Barnham the only period unrepresented is Norman; at Icklingham and Lakenheath, St. Acheul; and at Weeting, Saxon. Those unrepresented at Eriswell are St. Acheul and Norman; at Mildenhall, Chelles and Norman; at Wangford, St. Acheul and Norman; at West Stow, St. Acheul and Late Keltic; and at Bodney, Chelles and St. Acheul. Every parish has yielded remains of the Neolithic period. Four parishes have had relics of six of the cultural periods recorded; nine of five; thirteen of four; ten of three; seventeen of two; and twelve of one.

In the Norfolk portion of Breckland there are three of the great dykes, and two somewhat degenerate examples in the Suffolk parish of Cavenham. "Bicham dike" or "Devil's dyke" extends for 5 miles from near the River Nar at Narborough to marshy ground southwest of the ruined church of St. John, Beechamwell. Originally it appears to have been about 18 feet from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the rampart, the ditch being on the eastern side. Further south the Fendyke or Weeting Devil's Dyke runs from the marshlands of

the Wissey at Cranwich to that of the Little Ouse at Weeting, with the ditch sometimes on the western side and sometimes on the eastern, while in parts there is a ditch on each side, and this may have been its original form. The Garboldishham Devil's Ditch is 2 miles in length, and extends from the edge of the alluvium bordering the Little Ouse almost to the junction of the road from West Harling with that from Garboldisham to East Harling. It consists of a ditch with a small bank on each side, and there is a tradition at Garboldisham that "soldiers used to lie in it when they fought in the wars." On Cavenham Heath there are two lines of "Black Ditches," one to the north (1,100 yards in length), the other to the south ($1\frac{1}{4}$ miles in length) of the Icknield Way. The former is much spread, with a broad shallow fosse; the latter is about 27 feet wide and from 4 to 6 feet high, with the ditch filled in. Apart from these, the great mound and Red Castle at Thetford, the district is singularly devoid of important earthworks. In Camp-hill Plantation, Narborough, there is an earthwork covering about $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres, consisting of a circular ditch surrounding a mound about 30 feet in height, and at Fakenham Magna a big oval entrenchment which, whatever its origin, was subsequently used for the protection of a homestead. Homestead moats are few; perhaps the most interesting is the square dry moat not far from Santon Church.

The poverty of the land and the sparsity of the population are made apparent in many ways. The churches of Buckenham Tofts, Caldecot, Colveston, Little Hockham, and Lynford have disappeared; those of Barnham St. Martin, Beechamwell All Saints and St. John, Cockley

Cley St. Peter, Garboldisham All Saints, Gasthorpe, Feltwell St. Nicholas, Roudham, Sturston, Weeting All Saints, and West Wretham are in ruins ; those of Little Cressingham, Foulden, Great Hockham and Shingham partly ruined ; and Knettishall, and Icklingham All Saints disused. For the same reasons most of the village churches do not compare in beauty or interest with those in other parts of East Anglia. The characteristic round towers of Norfolk and Suffolk are found, with the exception of Icklingham All Saints, only in the Norfolk portion of Breckland at Cockley Cley, Cranwich, Kilverstone, Merton and Weeting St. Mary, and with an octagonal upper story at Beechamwell St. Mary, Breckles, Croxton, South Pickenham, Stanford and Threxton. Among the special features worthy of note are an apsidal chancel at Cockley Cley ; Norman doorways at Brettenham, Langford, Larling, Santon Downham, Shingham, Threxton, West Stow and Wordwell ; Norman chancels at Lakenheath and Santon Downham ; a lofty clerestory overlapping the chancel and a window over the chancel arch at East Harling ; a tower with long and short work and without buttresses at Barton Mills ; a chancel paved with mediæval tiles at Icklingham All Saints ; an Early English arcade on each side of the chancel at Lackford ; fine west towers at Garboldisham, Illington, Lakenheath and Methwold ; a tower on the south side of the church at Hockwold ; lofty spires at Methwold and Wilton ; lead-covered spires at East Harling, Mundford and West Tofts ; low side windows at Barton Mills, Fakenham Magna, Hockham and Threxton ; thatched roofs at Beechamwell, Rushford and Thompson ; hour-glass stands at Breckles and Merton ; an ancient almsbox at Gooderstone ; pre-

Reformation stalls at East Harling and Thompson; font covers at East Wretham and Merton; screens in many churches; sedilia at Hockwold; consecration crosses at Bodney; altar slabs at Larling and South Pickenham; and a fine Norman font at Breckles. At Rushford the tower has no openings, except two arrow-slits, for 50 feet from the ground; Wordwell Church is only 33 feet in length; and Santon Church of St. Helen, one of the smallest in East Anglia, was erected in 1628, its chancel having originally formed the south transept of West Tofts Church.

Monastic remains are scant and poor. There are ruined chapels to St. Lawrence at Eriswell, to St. Mary at Cockley Cley and to St. Margaret at Hilborough; and slight evidence of Bromehill Priory, Weeting, founded by Sir Hugh de Plaiz in the time of King John. At Rushford two sides of the quadrangle of the College of St. John the Evangelist founded by Sir Edmund Gonville in the time of Edward III are now used as a rectory house.

The only castle among the Breckland villages was at Weeting surrounded by a deep rectangular moat filled with water. It was built in the eleventh century by William de Warenne, and was chosen by Charles Kingsley for some of the finest scenes of *Hereward the Wake*. A considerable portion of the keep remains in the park near the hall.

In addition to the boundary cross on Barnham Cross Common, fine mediæval crosses still remain at Wilton and Northwold, and portions of others at Maid's Cross Hill, Lakenheath; Mount Ephraim, Weeting; and on the boundary of Cockley Cley and Oxburgh.

From the fact that there has for long been a tendency

to incorporate several parishes in one estate the number of halls is much less than the number of villages, though this has perhaps added to the importance of the existing buildings. In its original form West Stow Hall was one of the finest buildings in the district, but it has been greatly reduced in size, and so restored as to have lost much of its charm. It was rebuilt by Sir John Crofts, who died in 1557, and the chief remaining portions of the Hall which he erected are the gatehouse, a covered arcade or cloister and the north side. Breckles Hall, which is one of the most beautiful and interesting Elizabethan houses in the country, has been skilfully restored. The Priory at Great Cressingham dates from 1513. There is some good Perpendicular tracery and the upper story on the south front is completely overlaid with rich panel work in moulded brick. It was never a religious house, but in the thirteenth century the manor belonged to the Prior and Convent of Norwich. Narborough Hall was built about 1530 by Judge Spelman ; Culford Hall about 1591 by Sir Nicholas Bacon ; Eriswell Hall is now a farmhouse ; Wangford Hall, also a farmhouse, was the residence of Sir Robert Wright, Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas and King's Bench, who presided at the trial of the Seven Bishops and died in 1689 ; Merton Hall was built about 1640 ; and Elveden Hall was built in 1870 for the late Maharajah Duleep Singh, who had purchased the estate in 1863. There are modern halls at Cavenham, Icklingham, Santon Downham, Beechamwell, Shadwell, Buckenham Tofts, Cockley Cley, Didlington, Garboldisham, West Harling, Hockham, Hockwold, Kilverstone, Lynford, South Pickenham, Riddlesworth, Weeting and West Wretham. Weeting Hall was one

of the seats of the Earl of Monteith, who was morbidly afraid of smallpox, and had five houses between Weeting and his Devonshire seat, so that he should, as far as possible, avoid all risks of contagion. Later it became the seat of the Angersteins.

Other than the halls the only modern buildings worthy of note are the war memorial and bell tower at Elveden. The former is by the main road between Elveden and Barton Mills at the junction of Elveden, Eriswell and Icklingham, and consists of a column 113 feet in height, the Corinthian shaft of Weldon stone crowned by an urn of Portland stone. Inside from base to summit is a winding staircase of 148 steps. The bell tower is of stone with faced flint panels, is 80 feet in height, and is connected with the church by a cloister. Bosses and shields are elaborately carved and the whole structure is graceful and beautiful. It was erected to the memory of Viscountess Iveagh and was dedicated on October 8, 1922.

Even the inn has found insufficient patronage to enable it to survive in many of the villages, and the inhabitants of twenty-seven have to seek refreshment in another parish. Some of the village inns, old-fashioned but comfortable, have a more than local reputation. The "Bull" at Barton Mills with eleven sash and three dormer windows in its frontage, and a spacious courtyard, is a fine type of the old coaching-house. The "Crown" at Mundford is a seventeenth-century house, and the "Angel" at Larlingford and the "Fox" at Garboldisham are also of some antiquity.

A few parishes only can be dealt with in any detail, but these are typical of the remainder. It would be difficult to find a parish less attractive than Santon to

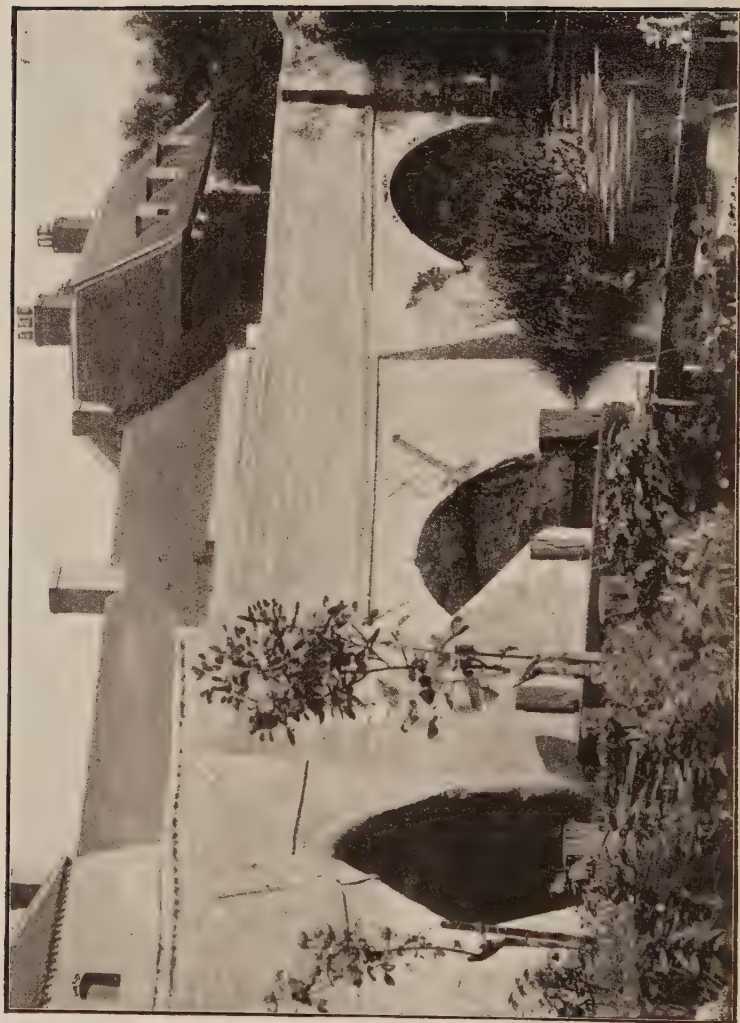
those who like to see their landscapes cut up into small arable fields and pastures with neatly-trimmed hedges and hedgerow timber, and abounding signs of agricultural prosperity. There is no hedge in the parish, and should it be necessary to enclose an area for arable purposes it is done with posts and wire-netting, and made as nearly rabbit-proof as possible. The parish consists entirely of heathland intersected with belts and coppices, sadly depleted of timber during the war, but since partly planted by the Forestry Commission. Some of it is a plateau, but the greater part consists of long slopes to the narrow alluvium bordering the Little Ouse. The whole of Santon consists of one heathland farm, with an ancient farmhouse close by the little church and between the rail and the river. Morden's map of Norfolk in 1695 showed the main road from Thetford to Brandon passing through Santon instead of Santon Downham, as at present. Some of its course through Santon and Weeting is now planted over, and it is only distinguished with difficulty. In 1695 there were two halls or farmhouses in Santon, one named Santon House and the other Caldecot. Caldecot or Caldecot is "cold cot," and has, says Canon Isaac Taylor in his *Words and Places*, often been applied to a disused Roman village near a highway. Andrew le Caldecote was Mayor of Thetford in the reign of Edward III. The present farm-house is Santon House Farm, and in the adjoining Staunch Meadow is the dry moat surrounding the flint foundations which are all that remain of Santon House, where it is said that Thomas Shadwell, the poet laureate, was born. In 1801 there was a population of ten only. To-day with one inhabitant for every 33 acres of land, Santon is one of the most

sparsely inhabited parishes in Breckland, but in pre-historic times it must have been a centre of civilization. The flint implements of Neolithic man occur in great abundance, though an absence of local knowledge might lead a casual visitor to assume quite the contrary. Most of the parish is heathland. The wind blows the loose sand about with terrific force, and during a gale the atmosphere is often as thick as a London fog, the driving sand entirely obscuring belts close at hand, providing an unpleasant but realistic reproduction of the sand-storm of the desert. The number of those who appreciate the charm of the heathland is probably few, but those to whom the call does come, never fail to hear it. It is more insistent on some occasions than on others, but the call never quite ceases, and in few districts is it possible so fully to gratify the desire for sand, rabbits, pines, bracken, heather, and the tiny flowers of the heathland.

Bodney is another isolated parish. Few people visit it and those that do usually have some definite object. It is 6 miles from the nearest railway station at Watton, and 8 from Brandon or Swaffham, bounded north and west and partly on the east by a tributary of the Wissey, which rises in Scoulton Mere. The parish is crossed by no main road, and only by two by-roads, the "Watton Road" and the "Smugglers' Road," though there are many sandy trackways. Its remoteness from the ordinary traffic of a rural parish is due to the fact that no road through it is the shortest cut between two villages, for although it may be so on the map, the condition of the byways renders alternative routes preferable. Yet its area is 2,621 acres, consisting of two farms, and its population 86, so that each man, woman and child in the parish,

desiring to have free breathing-space, and not to be jostled by other inhabitants of the planet, is entitled to 30 acres. Yet they are all clustered in three settlements, at the Hall Farm, Lodge Farm, and Red Buildings. The chief approach to Bodney is by a road diverging from the main road between Mundford and Swaffham, and passing over Hollow Heath, on the eastern outskirts of which the river is crossed by Bodney Further Bridge and Bodney Great Bridge, and the parish is entered. The road curls round the base of a hillock partly artificial on which stands the little church surrounded by the churchyard. In striking contrast to many Norfolk churches there is not seating accommodation for half the population of the parish, although a little Primitive Methodist Chapel supplies the deficiency. Several French nuns are buried on the north side of the churchyard. These came over during the French Revolution in 1792, and lived at the Hall, which was lent to them by the then owners, the Tasburgh family. Only the site of the Hall remains south of the church, but this was certainly not the oldest important house in the parish, for on the edge of the riverside marshland to the north is an ancient rectangular moat. There is ample evidence that Bodney is of less importance now than in earlier days. Whether it was ever inhabited by a large number of persons is doubtful, for its sandy soil over a subsoil of chalk and gravel is of no great agricultural richness, as is evidenced by the fact that the rateable value of the whole parish, including the buildings, is only £649. On the land alone this would give a rateable value of just under 5s. an acre, and when two farm-houses and buildings and cottages are deducted, this leaves but a very small average.

Roudham is a heathland parish which at one time supported a larger population. In 1615 twenty-six persons died in this parish, five in one day. Communicants numbered eighty-six in 1603. In the latter part of the seventeenth century the small landowners were bought out, with the result that the population decreased and the place decayed. A little more than a century ago malting appears to have been the chief industry of the inhabitants. There were then two inns, the "Dolphin" and the "Three Hoops," though even their sites now appear to be unknown. The winding road on which a few houses abut is still known as "The Street." Two drifts leading from this are known as "Street Gate" and "Ringle Gate," and there was formerly a "Fen Gate." From the church there are seven ways out of Roudham, each with distinctive characteristics. Ruined and ivy-covered, the church of St. Andrew is the chief landmark. On August 10, 1736, plumbers were at work repairing the lead on the top of the tower, when one of them blew the ashes out of his pipe. These fell on the thatch and fire destroyed the greater part of the church. Tradition records that an appeal for subscriptions for the repair of the church received such a generous response that the treasurer decamped with the proceeds. At the west end in an iron-railed enclosure are five altar-tombs to members of the Boyce family.



BRANDON BRIDGE

CHAPTER XIV

The Breckland Towns

OF the four towns in Breckland, Swaffham is on the northern border and therefore owes part of its prosperity to the proximity of the boulder clay area; Mildenhall is on the southern border, on the River Lark and the edge of the fens; Thetford and Brandon are on the little Ouse, Thetford where the great fords of the Icknield Way were situated, and Brandon at the end of a tongue of the fens. They have all the characteristics of ancient market-towns and much of their fascination.

No community in England can lay claim to greater antiquity than Brandon, a fact chiefly owing to the excellent quality of the flint derived from the chalk in the district. Here the archaic gun flint industry, which I have fully described elsewhere,¹ is still carried on, and the Lingheath flint-pits provide examples of one of the most primitive types of mining in this country. Another local industry of which the origin was due to the character of the district is the furriery trade, of which Brandon has been one of the chief British centres for a century past. Nearly 500 persons are thus employed. The hare, rabbit and other skins now come from all parts of

¹ *Norfolk and Suffolk* (A. & C. Black).

the world, and after the preliminary processes, the product is sent to manufacturers to be converted into felt hats. Brandon has never filled any big place in the history of either Norfolk or Suffolk, having been to a large extent self-contained and isolated by the heaths and fens. A charter for a weekly market was granted in 1542. The bridge over the Little Ouse, and its history, have been previously dealt with. Its surroundings offer irresistible attractions to the artist, and the river, with its twenty-two species of coarse fish, to the angler. Southwards from the bridge stretches the fine thoroughfare known as High Street, which gradually widens to the Market Hill. Westward from the Market Hill is London Road, and on one side of it is a splendid avenue of lime trees, nearly half a mile in length, and reaching almost to the parish church. This is situated in a hamlet known as Town Street. Most of the present building dates from about 1420, but has no features of especial interest.

If only for its magnificent church, the tower of which, 112 feet high, dominates the town and district, Mildenhall will act as a magnet to the discerning visitor. The nave and aisles are Perpendicular, with wonderful roofs, that of the nave being one of the best in the county. The chancel is chiefly Decorated, and north of it is an Early English chapel. Above the north porch, which has a groined roof, with carved bosses, is a chamber which was formerly a Lady Chapel. The church is of noble proportions, beautifully decorated and contains some fine brasses and altar-tombs. The quaintly-gabled Manor House was built early in the seventeenth century by Sir Henry North; and the Market Cross is a squat hexagonal timber structure said to date from the reign of Henry V.

With its winding streets, varieties of domestic architecture, high brick walls, and river, Mildenhall is an excellent example of an old-fashioned market-town.

As Bury St. Edmunds was the fashionable centre for West Suffolk, so was Swaffham that for West Norfolk in pre-railway days. It is situated on a ridge some 210 feet above sea-level, and from its position and the tonic properties of the air from the surrounding light lands has been called "the Montpellier of England." Swaffham Races were formerly held on the heath and lasted three days, and the first association of coursers of which there is any record was the Swaffham Club founded in 1776 by Lord Orford and still in existence. The Market Cross was also built by the Earl of Orford in 1783 at a cost of £400, half of which went for the statue of Ceres, the harvest goddess, which surmounts the leaded dome, supported by a peristyle of circular columns. Also in the Market Place is a hexagonal monument, surmounted by a cupola with a drinking fountain below, enclosing a bronze bust of Sir William Bagge, Bart., Conservative M.P. for West Norfolk from 1837 to 1857. This monument was erected in 1882, the cost being defrayed by public subscription. The Camping Land was left to the town in 1475 by John Botewright "for the practise of archery and military exercises, and such other proper sports as may be approved by the inhabitants from time to time." From the Camping Land access may be obtained to the churchyard and to the Antinghams, across which the fine avenue of limes in the churchyard and Camping Land is continued by an avenue of walnuts, and on the other side of Necton Road by limes to the Manor House.

The parish church of SS. Peter and Paul is one of the finest in the county and is approached from the Market Place by Church Alley and an avenue of lime trees planted in 1762 by a French refugee named Daniel Fortin on the day his son William—who died in 1853—was born. The church consists of chancel, clerestoried nave of seven bays, transepts, north and south aisles, and a square western tower erected in 1510; with enriched battlements, crocketed pinnacles, and figures in the centre of each side. This has a spire dating from 1778, and contains a fine peal of eight bells. Most of the present building was erected between 1454 and 1490. The lower part of the church is chiefly Early English with Perpendicular windows inserted, and there is a magnificent Perpendicular clerestory—with twenty-six windows. In the nave the chief feature of interest is the fine double hammer-beam roof which is of chestnut with about 200 carved angels bearing shields relating to the Passion and Crucifixion. In the chancel are carved oak effigies of the Swaffham pedlar, his wife and dog, reminders of the well-known legend. The priest's chamber, over the ancient vestry, contains a valuable library of about 400 volumes. Here also is preserved the famous *Black Book* of Swaffham, which contains one of the oldest terriers in existence, dating from 1454.

Few towns in England have so many attractive features within so small a compass as Thetford. The rivers Little Ouse and Thet unite in the heart of the borough. Nun's Bridge over the former river is at one end of a delightful river-side path, the Spring Walk, which was constructed in 1818 when a spring in the adjoining meadow had considerable repute as a chalybeate spa. Alongside the

Walk is Spring House, the foundation-stone of which was laid in 1819 by the Duke of Grafton. It was then used as a pump room for visitors to the spa, but is now a private residence. Adjoining the Little Ouse is a manufactory of patent steel pulp ware—one of two in Europe—on the site of a mill which at the time of Domesday Survey was known as Bishops' Mill, but subsequently as St. Audrey's Mill. At the western end of the Spring Walk are the "Little Bridges" for foot passengers across the Little Ouse and a mill stream into which flow two overfalls, one of them from the Thet on which is situated the Flour Mill, which from the Norman Conquest until the Reformation was owned by the King, Earl Warren, the Cluniac Monks and the Augustinian Friars, and for many centuries was known as the Pit Mill. The Mill Pool, with trees overhanging the river and glimpses of the tanned woodwork of the old warehouse by the Town Quay, has great attractions for artists and photographers. West of the Town Bridge there is another river-side walk, the Haling Path, bordered by stately trees and affording views of the Monks' Water Lane, the Water Meadows, the ruins of the Cluniac Priory, the first staunch, the Warren and the Warren Lodge, and ending at the Canons' Water Lane. These river-side walks have no equals in East Anglia for beauty.

Of the numerous monasteries and churches which indicate the ecclesiastical importance of the town in the Middle Ages, the remains, with a few exceptions, are scanty. The Cluniac Priory of St. Mary was one of the five largest monasteries of that order in England. Roger Bigod and Abbot Stephen laid the foundation-stones in 1107, and the monks entered into residence in 1114. The

church was about two-thirds the size of Norwich Cathedral. About 1250 the Chapel of the Virgin Mary was added, and thousands of pilgrims came to the town on account of the miracles wrought at her shrine. The ground-plan of the church may still be traced with little difficulty, but the ruins both of this and of the domestic parts of the priory are not very imposing. The most striking is undoubtedly the "Abbey Gate" of late fifteenth-century work, 36 feet square and 42 feet high. All the priory remains are in private grounds, and cannot be inspected without permission. In the grounds of Ford Place are scant remains of the convent of the Augustinian Friars, founded in 1387 by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; part of the cathedral church of St. Mary rebuilt by Bishop Herfast in 1071 is at the back of the Boys' Grammar School, which incorporates one of the tower arches of the church of the Holy Trinity; by the Brandon road are remains of the Priory of Canons of the Holy Sepulchre founded in 1109 by William de Warenne; and in the grounds of the Place Farm are the ruins of the Benedictine Nunnery of St. George, of which the church with a fine transitional Norman arch has been converted into a stable. Before the Dissolution there were at least nineteen parish churches in the town, in addition to five attached to the religious houses. Three of the parish churches remain, but agree in their lack of distinction with those in most of the Breckland villages. St. Cuthbert's is the only ancient church in Norfolk so dedicated; St. Mary's has a Norman font and north doorway; and St. Peter's Church has a tower of black flint erected in 1789.

Thetford's most important relic of the past is, however,

the Castle Hill and surrounding earthworks, all of which now belong to the Corporation and are scheduled as a National Monument. They are the largest earthworks in East Anglia. The central mound, made of chalk and covered with turf, and topped by several elms, has a vertical height of 81 feet and about 100 feet measured up the slope. Its base has a circumference of nearly 1,000 feet. It is surrounded by a deep moat, beyond which on the north is a double line of ramparts and ditches which were originally continued so as to form a horseshoe-shaped base-court. The total length of the existing ramparts is about 840 feet. North of the mound the first rampart has a height of 30 feet, and the second of 35 feet above the level of the adjoining ditch, while the "Wooded Hill" on the north-east is 35 feet above the adjoining ditch and the outer rampart 19 feet above.

The earthworks are close by what was anciently the ford of the Icknield Way, but they do not appear to have been thrown up until the time of the Normans, who erected a castle of some kind, which was dismantled before 1172.

The Ancient House in White Hart Street, now a museum owned by the Corporation, is perhaps even more attractive than its contents. It is a half-timbered building erected in the second half of the fifteenth century, with an overhanging upper story, and a high hooded doorway, with many carved and finely moulded timbers in the frontage. The main room on the ground floor has a finely panelled and richly moulded screen, open at the top, and one of the finest fifteenth-century ceilings in the country. The main oak beams are beautifully carved, while the many smaller ones are also moulded and carved

in diverse patterns. Below the ceiling is a fine open-work carved oak frieze, beneath which are the original oak uprights and nogging. There is also the original open fireplace. The north room on the first floor has two of the original windows, and all the rooms have half-timber work. The main room is devoted to local archæology, and has an especially fine series of Neolithic flint implements, while one of those on the first floor contains natural history specimens, and the other local prints.

Other interesting domestic buildings include the "Bell Hotel," mostly Elizabethan, though there was an inn of that name on the site in 1493; the Elizabethan Manor House; the King's House bought in 1609 for James I: four almshouses on Bury Road erected in 1612, and the "Dolphin" inn dating from 1694.

In Cage Lane is the ruined Quaker Chapel adjoining a building in which the stocks are still preserved. The Friends' Meeting House was used by them from 1696 to 1895, and was described by Dr. M. D. Conway as the "more important birthplace" of Thomas Paine, the most noted native of the town. Overlooking the Market Place is the Guildhall, rebuilt in 1902, for Thetford was incorporated as a borough in 1573.

There are nearly fifty roads and streets in the town; miles of chalk walls; common pastures known as School Plain, Melford Common, Carr Common and Barnham Common on the outskirts; and everywhere interesting links with the past. Thetford is a worthy centre of a fascinating district.

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